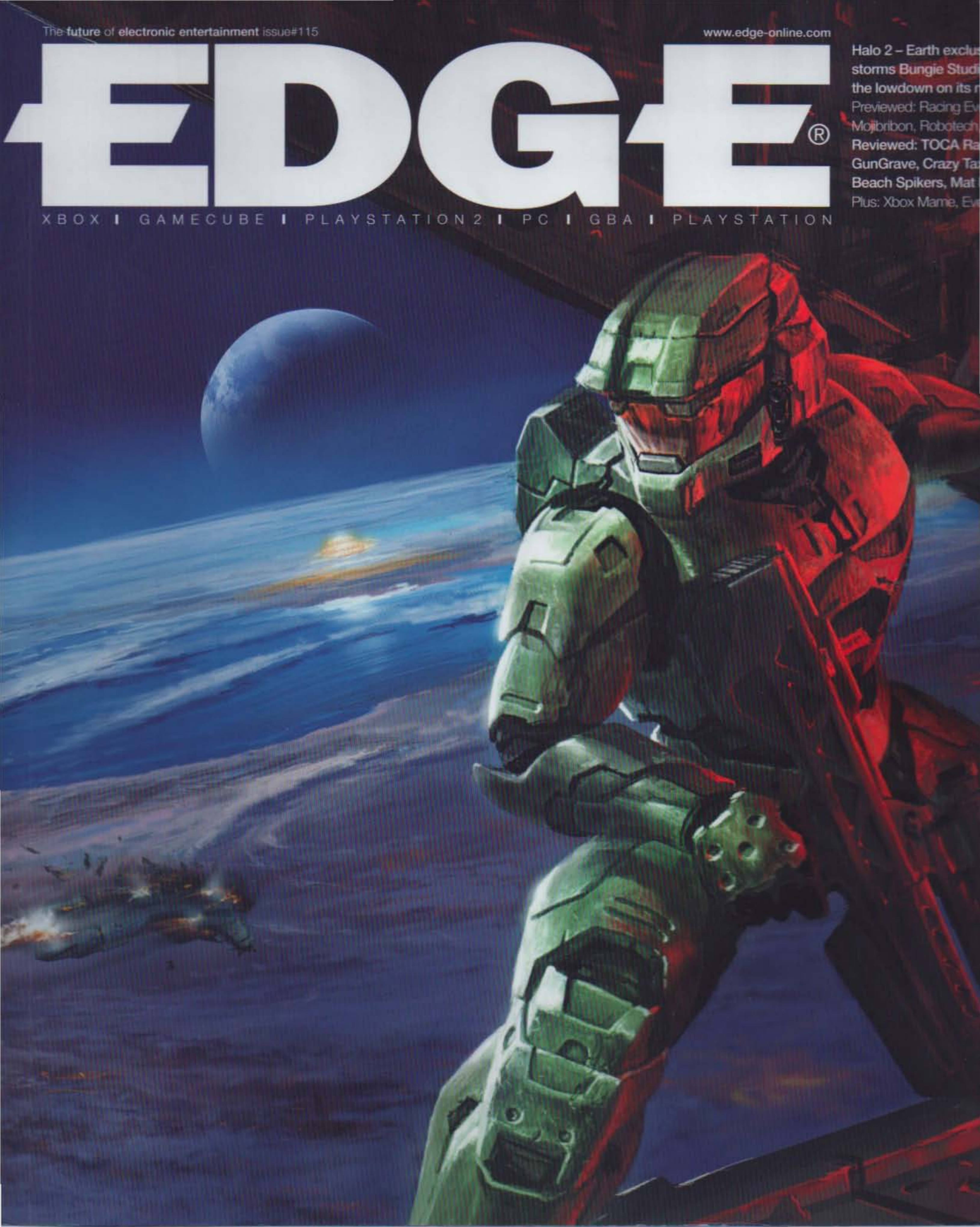
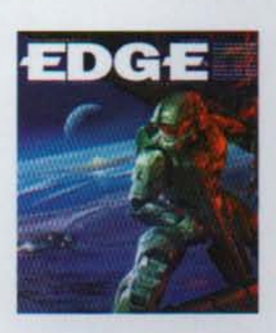


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GunGrave, Crazy
Beach Spikers, Mat
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Negotiations for the *Halo 2* exclusive began early. In fact, they started the day **Edge**'s first Xbox debug arrived with *Halo* already installed on its HD, some two weeks before the machine's US launch last November. It didn't take us long to work out that *Halo* was special and, given the developer, why the sequel would make perfect cover material.

Exclusives are an inextricable part of the videogame magazine circus. The invasion of gaming publications during the latter years of the '90s saw the level of competition attain absurd levels – a book about the extremes PR and editorial members went to in order to secure select coverage could easily be written (cocaine in exchange for front covers, holidays abroad, prostitutes… **Edge** forgets much of what it has heard over the years).

This relentless hunt for exclusives, as you'll no doubt be aware, invariably creates its own set of problems. In the frenzied chase for higher magazine circulations, too often the duty to the reader is ignored, their trust abused as the editorial team oversteps the mark and tricks the public into picking up its tome.

Admittedly this is mainly the domain of the exclusive review and the very reason **Edge** has actively removed itself from that unscrupulous process. Which is why you didn't get to read the *TOCA Race Driver* review last month. And similarly, why you won't see the *TimeSplitters2* review until **E**116 (to name the two most recent examples).

By their very nature previews don't present this set of problems. Naturally, there are commercial implications – **Edge** wouldn't insult your intelligence by pretending that a key sequel on the cover does little to enhance copy sales – but this team is driven by a passion for videogaming it genuinely believes it shares with its readers. And that's precisely why we'll continue to fight over the games we think you want to read about.

Enjoy the issue.



Features











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the 'halo again' issue















Prescreen







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Testscreen

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"Ten years, man! Ten year… Ten years! Ten years! Ten! Ten years! Ten years."

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Games platforms gear up for online gamble

As the major console manufacturers prepare for the tardy broadband boom, Edge offers its analysis of what the major online platforms have to offer

Microsoft and Sony have finally put their plans for network-connected consoles into action, in a bid to redefine the online gaming landscape over the course of the next five years. With the release of the PlayStation2 network adaptor in the US and Japan, Sony continues to tarry only in Europe, while Microsoft has announced that its Xbox Live service, which will be released in the US on November 15, will launch in this country early next year.

Even Nintendo, which continues to treat online gaming with some scepticism, has announced that its own network adaptor will be released before the end of the year in the US and Japan. And with the online gaming sector looking like an important battleground for dominance over the home console market, the PC continues to reign supreme as the online gaming platform of current choice.

Over the coming pages, **Edge** examines the forthcoming online services offered by each major platform, assessing their chances of dominating a sector that is, by virtue of the massive expenses already committed to it, a crucial one in shaping the fortunes of the videogame market as a whole. Certainly, there are several vested interests in ensuring that videogame content provides the spur for broadband take up, which will further drive sales of networked gaming platforms. Companies such as Telewest and NTL, for example, which have invested considerable sums in establishing the infrastructure required for high-speed network connections, or indeed companies such as Electronic Arts and Square, which hope to derive additional revenue streams from currently unexploited subscribers.

But it's worth remembering that barely a tiny minority of British households currently subscribe to broadband services (about one per cent), while only a third have access through a dial-up connection. Although analysts expect these figures to increase to meaningful levels by the year 2005, there is simply no guarantee that online gaming will provide either a stable source of revenue for Sony, a boost to market share for Microsoft, or indeed a stimulus for design innovation. For every party with a financial interest in the success of connected consoles, the next five years will be of massive significance. Although it's still very early in terms of network penetration and the development of online content, each of the major players is adopting widely divergent strategies. The coming months and years look set to be interesting times for all of us.



PlayStation2

The key advantages enjoyed by PlayStation2 over its competitors are that it is the first console to benefit from online services that are already up and running (discounting the sadly deceased Dreamcast, of course), and that it enjoys a commanding market share – and consequently the support of key software publishers and developers.

Sony's motivation for entering the online space appears to be the creation of an additional revenue stream, but also (according to the company's press releases) an "overall vision of PlayStation2 as a massmarket broadband platform in the home." In achieving such goals, these advantages are compelling ones.

Although the launch of online services in Japan has been characterised by significant teething troubles, with *Final Fantasy XI* suffering from all sorts of server problems and damaging bugs, the fact remains that several major publishers have already tied their fortunes to the success of PlayStation2 online. Square, for example, has announced that it aims to triple its online subscribers by March 2004 in a bid to generate much-needed revenue to offset losses incurred by its disastrous foray into movie-making. After its launch in May, *Final Fantasy XI* now has 120,000 subscribers paying a monthly fee of ¥1,280 (£7), and the company aims to have 400,000 by the end of its next fiscal year. Publishers that generate significant software sales in Japan, such as Koei and Capcom have also announced online games for the platform, while publishing behemoth Electronic Arts continues to be critical of Microsoft's approach.

"FFXI now has 120,000 subscribers paying a monthly fee of ¥1,280 (£7), and the company aims to have 400,000 by the end of next year"



SCEA president Kaz Hirai holds up the PlayStation2 Network Adapter at E3 back in May, launched (as promised back then) this August. Europe, however, faces the usual wait

Indeed while Microsoft is opting for a characteristically controlling role over the infrastructure of its services, Sony has maintained a more open attitude. One of the key areas of interest over the coming months and years will be whether either approach proves to be more effective in dominating the market. The flexibility of Sony's approach is manifest in its Network Adapter, recently released in the US at $39.99 (£26), which combines a 10/100 Ethernet connection with a 56KV.90 analogue modem, supporting both narrowband and broadband access. Users will even be able to choose any ISP to get online with the console in the US and presumably also in the UK.

Sony is also adopting a laissez-faire approach with publishers, allowing them to establish their own infrastructures and billing methods. While the initial investment by publishers will consequently need to be higher, the benefit of such an approach is that Sony takes a smaller cut of any revenue that's generated. And judging by a raft of titles such as *Final Fantasy XI*, *EverQuest Online Adventures*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, it would seem to be endorsed by a wide range of publishers: such compelling content is another feather in Sony's cap.

The possible impediments to PlayStation2's online services are the cost and effort of installing the Network Adapter and a potentially confusing lack of uniformity – though Sony hopes to make things more negotiable by means of an introductory disk that contains startup instructions. It's also worth pointing out that SCEE apparently continues to drag its feet with regard to the European launch of any online services, which may hand the advantage to Microsoft.





Electronic Arts' ***Madden NFL 2003*** and Activision's ***Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3***, just two examples of the support SCE has managed to generate among the strongest publishers





Star Wars Galaxies and ***EverQuest Online Adventures***: games that would previously only have reached the PC crowd, now leading the expected console online invasion

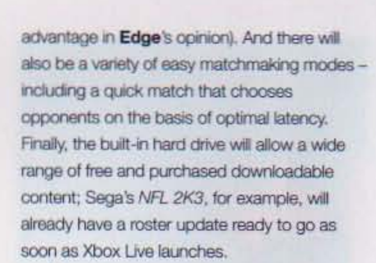


Xbox

Microsoft's Xbox Live contrasts starkly to the services offered by Sony. For a start, while there is, as yet, no word of any European launch for PlayStation2's online services, Xbox Live is expected to launch in the UK early next year after the current round of beta testing is complete. Furthermore, the service requires no expensive peripherals, since the starter kit, which will retail for the price of an Xbox game in the US ($50 or £32) and is expected to do so in the UK as well, contains everything needed to get online: game software, a microphone headset and a 12-month subscription.

But the major difference is that Microsoft has opted for complete control over every element of infrastructure. Xbox Live will consequently be a closed network, akin to a walled garden. As a result of this decision, as well as the purpose-built hardware design of the console, there are considerable advantages for gamers. A single 'Gamertag' online identity facilitates easy management of buddy lists and can be loaded onto a memory card to be accessed from a friend's Xbox (the only downside being that handles such as 'Satan', and 'Fragmaster' are likely to be snapped up).

Voice masking is another attractive feature, and Microsoft is keen to stress that the Xbox will never be blighted by the addition of a keyboard and mouse (a somewhat dubious advantage in **Edge**'s opinion). And there will also be a variety of easy matchmaking modes – including a quick match that chooses opponents on the basis of optimal latency. Finally, the built-in hard drive will allow a wide range of free and purchased downloadable content; Sega's *NFL 2K3*, for example, will already have a roster update ready to go as soon as Xbox Live launches.

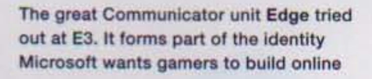


Despite the obvious strengths of Microsoft's approach though, there are potential pitfalls. The most apparent is simply that, though the service itself is available for a reasonable price, since it's restricted to broadband access, which remains considerably expensive – particularly in the UK – the cost to the consumer could be high. It's also worth pointing out that Microsoft's close control over the infrastructure and billing methods and the like, may not be to the tastes of every publisher. It's certainly not to the tastes of Electronic Arts, since although a publisher's initial financial outlay is lower, Microsoft consequently takes a larger slice of profits over the long-term in the form of royalties.

The disapproval of such a publisher isn't exactly desirable, but it's also not clear that Microsoft's approach will win the favour of access providers. The traffic generated by Xbox Live is restricted to the service itself, so the company could struggle to finalise agreements with such partners in advance of the launch.

"J Allard has described his goal as 'tens of thousands' of subscribers in 2002 and 'hundreds of thousands' by the end of 2003"

So while Xbox Live is undoubtedly good news for the hardcore gamer, it's not entirely clear whether it will sufficiently drive sales of the Xbox to match Microsoft's strategic ambition. Although Microsoft clearly accepts that the road to an online future must be travelled as a marathon and not a sprint, the company's long-term expectations are bullish. **J Allard** has described his goal as "tens of thousands" of subscribers in 2002 with this growing into "hundreds of thousands" by the end of 2003, ten million Xbox Live subscribers are projected for the end of 2007.
If broadband take-up proves slower than anticipated, the likelihood of such a figure being attained may be scuppered by the arrival of the successor to PlayStation2.





The great Communicator unit Edge tried out at E3. It forms part of the identity Microsoft wants gamers to build online

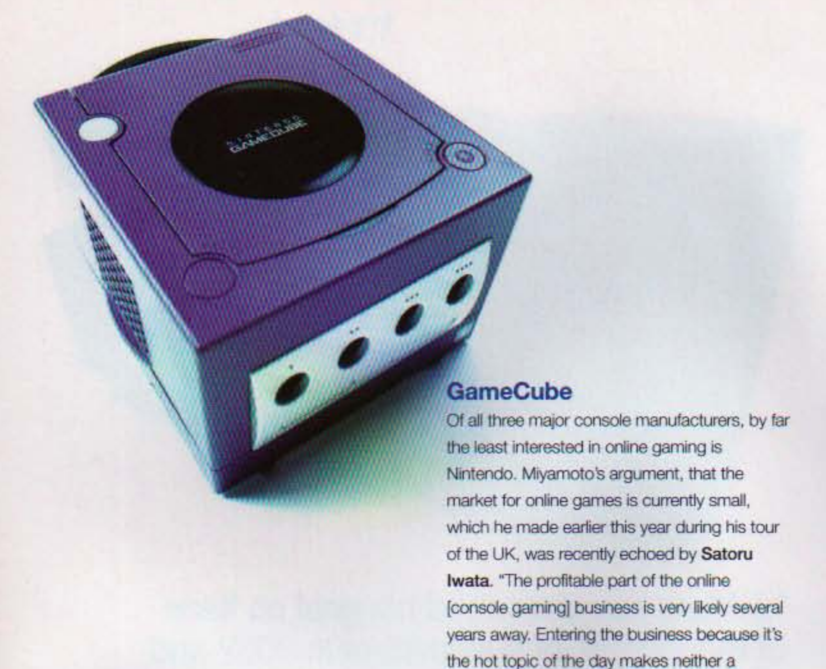






Clockwise from top left: *Halo 2*, *MechAssault*, *Ghost Recon* and *NFL Fever 2003*. Hardcore gamers should enjoy the broadband-only Xbox online experience. Others may follow suit





GameCube

Of all three major console manufacturers, by far the least interested in online gaming is Nintendo. Miyamoto's argument, that the market for online games is currently small, which he made earlier this year during his tour of the UK, was recently echoed by **Satoru Iwata**. "The profitable part of the online [console gaming] business is very likely several years away. Entering the business because it's the hot topic of the day makes neither a profitable business nor satisfied customers. That's why it will be a part of Nintendo's strategy, not the mainstay, as other companies are attempting to do. There are still too many barriers for any company to depend on it."

"Entering the [online] business because it's the hot topic of the day makes neither a profitable business nor satisfied customers"

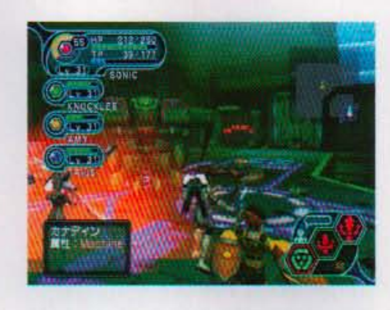
The interconnectivity between the GameCube and Game Boy Advance apparently remains more important to Nintendo than the yet-to-be-quantified riches offered by online gaming. Square, for example, was keen to emphasise the link-up feature when announcing its forthcoming GameCube RPG, which will be complemented by two GBA titles, while firstparty titles such as *Animal Forest* continue to explore the options of this kind of networking capability.

Nevertheless, as Iwata-san points out, online gaming is part of the company's strategy. Nintendo of Japan has announced that the GameCube broadband adaptor will be released in Japan on October 3, retailing at ¥3,800 (£20). And, like Sony, Nintendo is not restricting its service to broadband subscribers, since dial-up customers also have the option of getting online with a 56k modem.

Nintendo remains typically tight-lipped though about the details of its online services. What is known is that although Nintendo, again like Sony, is allowing thirdparty publishers to create their own infrastructures, GameSpy Industries will be supporting Nintendo's online service by porting its middleware and back-end services developer suites to the GameCube. This will make in-game player matchmaking possible, as well as buddy lists and the management of online data storage and tournament information, etc.

In a bid to encourage thirdparty publishers to take creative risks, Nintendo has also announced that it won't require royalty fees from revenue generated by online GameCube titles, though there is as yet no announcement regarding firstparty titles that might lead the way in such creative ingenuity – merely an assurance that several of Nintendo's internal development groups are researching online projects. So it remains up to that stalwart of online console gaming, Sega, to lead GameCube's online charge. *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II* is currently undergoing beta testing in Japan, and judging by **Edge**'s own experiences, the signs are positive that Ragol will flourish on Nintendo hardware.

Nintendo's stance is indicative of a characteristically conservative business strategy. Unlike Sony and Microsoft, the company is unwilling to gamble on an audience and market that has yet to be measured. But will Nintendo's reluctance to take risks at the present time result in a smaller reward than that enjoyed by those who are in the future? With the strength of the company's firstparty titles, and cost-efficient business model, perhaps it's less imperative for Nintendo to worry about the answer to such a question.









***PSO Episode I & II* should kick off the GC online plan, but with titles such as *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Zelda* and *F-Zero* Nintendo clearly isn't relying on online connectivity**



Japanese gamers get to buy the GC broadband adaptor on October 3 but NCL remains silent on detail of online services



PC

Of course, there's no proof in any case that the current constituency of online gamers are willing to migrate from their current chosen platform, the PC – or that existing console gamers will be willing to experiment with a form of gaming that has long been confined to the tech-savvy few. Which is just one of the reasons why the PC can't be disregarded in any discussion of online gaming, and why the platform is likely to prove an enduring incumbent. While it doesn't benefit from the strategic will of a single manufacturer, it is the most commonly used device to access the Internet in almost every part of the world.

The fundamental limitations of the PC as an online gaming platform are obvious. In the absence of any centrally implemented quality control, confusing interface design and low usability remain obstacles to its truly widespread adoption for networked play. To the usual difficulties of simply getting a PC game to run are added the labyrinthine complexities of accessing servers and configuring technology. Online gaming via PC doesn't come with any easy-to-read manual.

But the undeniable strengths of the PC are equally apparent. The most obvious is that it is currently the most popular online gaming platform. Although not entirely attractive to novice users, there is no reason for a majority of gamers that are happy with current online services to switch to a console that will inevitably have to endure the customary teething troubles. There's also the fact that the likes of Telewest's Blueyonder, and BTopenworld's online gaming service are the beneficiaries of decades of online gaming. Community management is therefore mature and their understanding of gamers' needs is considerable.

More significant, though, than a mature and sizeable online community, is the sheer variety of game genres that are accessible. While Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo can all boast a healthy roster of quality software, they are unlikely to be able to match the choice on offer via PC. And while the likes of Microsoft may argue that its online services are going to allow it to access a broader audience than that of the hardcore gamer, the PC already caters to an extraordinary range of gaming tastes, offering everything from the latest *Half-Life* mod to the simplest of parlour games. Indeed titles such as Square's *Final Fantasy XI* and Sega's *Phantasy Star Online*, although more traditionally associated with consoles, have been or are being released on the PC.

So although many doomsayers are predicting the end of its success as a gaming platform thanks to the growing online capabilities of consoles, it's unlikely that the success of either Xbox, PlayStation2, or GameCube, will be at the expense of the PC. Although it won't offer the same sort of self-contained and intuitive experience that the console manufacturers are promising, it will present games with unlimited scope for user-defined content, and an exceedingly large array of choice.

> "There's no reason for gamers that are happy with current online services to switch to a console that will have to endure teething troubles"





The greatest strength of the PC as an online platform is the diversity of the content playable on it and the audience it attracts, such as *Age of Mythology* and *The Sims Online*





Text Twist is just one of the many parlour games playable on the PC. *World of Warcraft* is just one of the seemingly infinite number of complex and interaction-heavy MMRPGs

Texas serves up SIGGRAPH 2002

San Antonio is the home of the Alamo, but will the industry remember SIGGRAPH 2002?

The debate on realism

Special SIGGRAPH discussion ponders the need for greater realism in games

With the games hardware beginning to challenge film for CG realism, the question on the minds of some artists, producers and hardware engineers is whether or not it's worth pushing forward with the power of hardware or the quality of software. Does each new advance bring a diminishing return on the effort?

This was the question being posed by Dr **Jon Peddie**, a graphics hardware expert, as he hosted a panel discussion on the subject. "We are asking ourselves: 'Are we reaching the point of diminishing returns? Have we done enough, do we really need to push the envelope any further?'" said Peddie. "There are some people in the industry who think we have done enough. In fact they refer to it as good enough. In some situations that's true, but for real, serious graphics, I think it's not."

With a panel including Bob Bennett of Alias|Wavefront, Andy Thompson of ATI, Kurt Akeley of ExLunia nVidia, Richard Chuang of PDI/Dreamworks and Michael Sheasby of Softimage, Peddie went on to point out that while we are on the cusp of being able to render realistic hair, the simulation of things like cloth, as well as lipsynching, are examples of areas where improvement still needs to be made in realtime rendering. The question he put out is whether or not incremental improvements in such fields will inspire the games audience and keep them coming.



Down in southern Texas, the sun shines hot and the food is served even hotter, but the 3D graphics industry will look back on SIGGRAPH 2002, held in San Antonio from June 21–26, as a lukewarm affair. It may have been the reluctance of Americans to fly since 9/11, the slowdown in the US economy or just the location, but this year's event couldn't quite meet the levels of excitement reached last year in LA, or in 2000 in New Orleans.

For 3D artists attending the event to pick up creative and technical knowledge, the show had its usual array of courses, presentations and discussion panels in its Conference section. Certainly, those impressed by behind-the-scenes talks on how the special effects were done in major motion pictures were well catered for. A whole day was devoted to the creation of a CG bird character for Sony Pictures Imageworks' 'Stuart Little 2', and artists from the same company were on hand to strip away the mystique behind the effects for 'Spider-Man'. And let's not forget 'Star Wars' or 'The Lord of the Rings'. Meanwhile, more theoretical talks pushed into areas such as realtime shading, processes like inverse rendering and global illumination and the vision for OpenGL 2.0 – all topics to fascinate the 3D software specialist.

However, the games-specific content presented during the conference was surprisingly thin on the ground, especially considering that the games industry is reputedly making more money than the film industry, and is employing huge numbers of 3D artists.

"Games-specific content was surprisingly thin on the ground, especially considering that games are making more money than films"

Comparatively few sessions were devoted specifically to the design of game graphics specifically and, perhaps as a consequence, it seemed, very few games artists bothered to make the trip to San Antonio. **Edge** didn't see any UK games developers at the event.

Likewise, few games companies took space within the SIGGRAPH Exhibition – Blizzard, Electronic Arts and Relic Entertainment being the only ones to pitch their tents on the show floor and accept showreels and CVs from budding 3D artists. What the exhibition was able to offer was plenty in the way of exciting new 3D software for creatives.

Though still a relatively expensive package, Softimage's XSI has pushed ahead in terms of usability and the company used SIGGRAPH to announce the release of version 3, which ships in October. On top of a general improvement in the program's speed, this version includes an RTK for crowd simulation, more intuitive character rigging, platform development kits for PS2 and Xbox, plus a DirectX realtime shader system that enables artists to directly apply shaders and edit their DX code on the fly. The company is keen to see XSI taken up in games development, and announced Valve as a new user of its software, as well as the shipping of 25 XSI seats to Glasgow Caledonian University's MA in Games Development course.

If you want good fluid dynamics in Softimage|XSI, though, you're probably best of turning to a thirdparty solution such as Next Limit's RealWave 2, which was also announced at the show. Not so for Maya users, however. SIGGRAPH 2002 saw the unveiling of Maya 4.5, which boasts as its main new enhancement a suite for creating fluid effects. Smoke, waves, foam, viscous liquids, atmospheric effects and more can now be simulated and rendered in Maya Unlimited. Released late September, the program is now available on Windows, Linux and Max OS X.



Squashable and stretchable animation boning is one of the new features of discreet's character studio 4, the latest character animation plug-in for 3ds max

'The Cathedral', by the Polish company Platige Image, was the winner of Best Short in SIGGRAPH's Computer Animation Festival. It was made using the popular game graphics tool 3ds max

The other major software announcement was the release of Maxon's Cinema 4D XL R8. Although not as talked about as the likes of 3ds max and Maya, Cinema has quietly crept into the market and, according to Maxon, is now the third most widely used serious 3D application in the US. The new release comes in at $1,695 (£1,095) and comes with new modelling tools, weighting on Sub-D surfaces, rendering tweaks for depth of field, a character animation toolset called MOCCA, new bones and IK, soft IK and the Thinking Particles module from Cebas. Its impact in the games industry may be limited, but it's one to watch.

With 3ds max 5 already announced, discreet kept up its momentum with the unveiling of character studio 4. Alongside new motion capture and f-curve editing features, cs4's big story is the inclusion of something called quaternion curves – a special mathematical system to assist with character motion. According to discreet, the quaternion feature enables better animation of characters that are interacting with props within a scene, for instance when juggling or participating in complex swordplay.

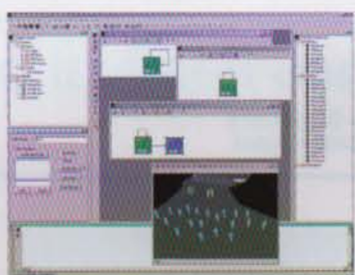


The SIGGRAPH exhibition was smaller than in previous years, but relatively enthusiastic. Sony Pictures Imageworks was offering free art lessons every day

The Brazilian

Also on the discreet stand was a company called Splutterfish. This small outfit is impressing artists across the industry with the quality and usabilty of its rendering system, Brazil, which is available for max at $1,200 (£776). Even the likes of Pixar, with its top-end Renderman system, should take note – the quality and range of options are superb, though Brazil's impact in the games industry will be limited. Another software highlight was Curious Labs' Poser 5, which will be released later in the year. Nearly everyone in 3D has dabbled with Poser, and its new Face Lab feature includes a highly intuitive way of putting the faces of real people onto Poser models, with incredibly realistic results. Meanwhile, the inclusion of anatomically accurate genitalia will ensure the application stays at the forefront when it comes to amateur digital porn...

Hardware-wise, programmable 3D chips are the in thing, with 3D Labs, ATI and nVidia all talking about their latest chips and how CG pros will now be able to program the hardware directly in order to push their rendering, graphics quality and performance even further. It may just be nVidia that has the greatest impact on the industry as, despite a new range of cards from 3D Labs, and the FireGL X1 for ATI, nVidia was pushing its new Cg language – a version of C++ specifically dedicated to graphics programming. The 3D software developers were taking note of that, as well as OpenGL 2.0, which continues to develop and should be adopted as a standard soon.



SoftimageIXSI 3 was announced, with its tools for simulating crowds, while AliasIWavefront made waves with the inclusion of fluid dynamics in Maya 4.5

Next year, the show hits the road again and will be held in San Diego. Visit http://www.siggraph.org for details.

CUTTINGS



Bitmap Brothers classic comes to Pocket PC

Thanks to publisher Infinite Ventures, which specialises in leisure software for PDAs, *Speedball 2* has been developed for Microsoft Pocket PC compatible devices, updating the 1990 Commodore Amiga classic for the modern mobile era.

It's been converted by Broadsword Interactive, and should complement Crawfish Interactive's imminent Game Boy Advance conversion of the *Speedball* franchise, and whet appetites for the Bitmap's own forthcoming online *Speedball* title. A free demo, as well as the full retail version, is available from http://www.portable-games.com/speedball

BioWare announces two titles

Fresh from its critical and commercial success with the magnificent *Neverwinter Nights*, BioWare has announced that it has two further titles in development, in addition to the forthcoming 'Star Wars' RPG, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. Microsoft is to publish the first of the two games that the company is developing, which will appear on Xbox, while the second will be developed for the PC. Each will be an original roleplaying title, taking place in an original game universe, and will apparently feature the characteristically engrossing and absorbing mechanics that have typified titles such as *Baldur's Gate*.

Vivendi up for sale

Owing to the wider financial difficulties of Vivendi Universal, the company's videogame division is rumoured to be up for grabs. According to an interview in the Wall Street Journal, Vivendi chairman Jean-Rene Fourtou views the games division as expendable, and selling it off would help offset some of the beleaguered company's sizeable debts. Although no firm offer has been made as this issue goes to press, there is rumoured to be considerable interest from several companies in brands such as Blizzard, Sierra and Universal Interactive.

Sony suffers legal setback in mod-chip battle

Sony's mod-chip court case backfires down under as Australian court ruling casts doubts about legality of region-restricted software

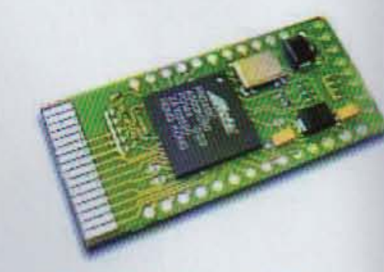


Sony's recent drive to eliminate the threat of piracy by clamping down on mod-chip manufacturers and vendors hit a stumbling block last month, when an Australian judge dismissed the company's claims that it was unlawful to sell and install PlayStation2 mod-chips. The result of the court case contrasts with the successful legal action taken earlier this year in the UK, against Channel Technology, which was found guilty of enabling the unlawful circumvention of Sony's copy protection schemes by manufacturing its Messiah chip (**E**108). It also prompted the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to renew calls for an inquiry into the legality of region-restricted software.

Federal court judge Roland Sackville ruled that Sony failed to show that the mod-chips in question bypassed the console's copyright protection measures. More damagingly, he also drew attention to the fact that mod-chips allow users to play games that have been legally purchased in another region – a perennial bugbear of Australia's consumer watchdog, which argues that it should be made unlawful to prevent Australian consumers from purchasing videogame software overseas.

With Channel Technology unlikely to appeal against Sony's successful action, the legality of mod-chips in Europe remains a grey area, though console manufacturers should surely take note of Sackville's ruling as they persist in maintaining some old-fashioned and restrictive practices.

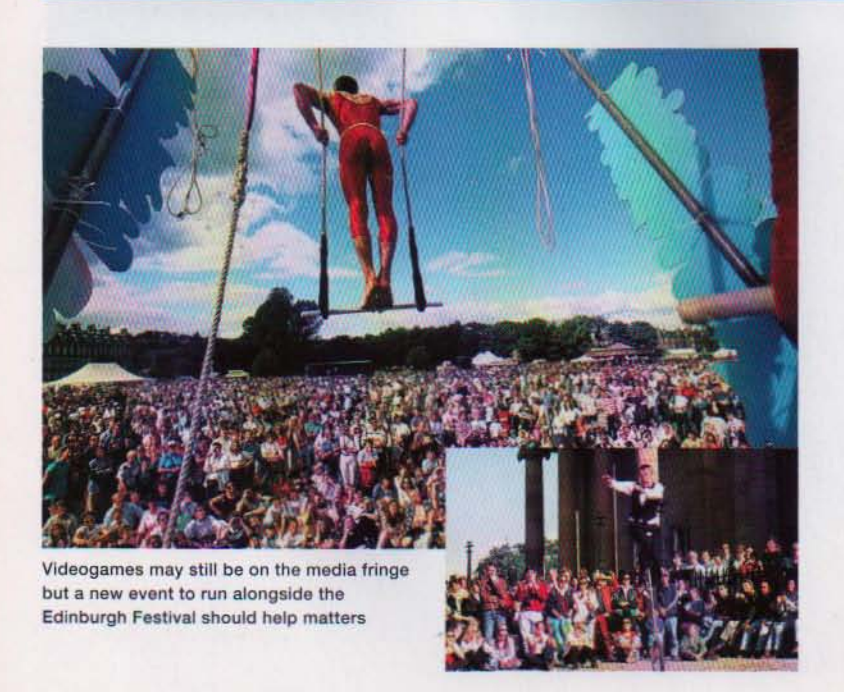
Of course, while Sony continues in its bid to eliminate would-be mod-chippers, Microsoft seems to have long since abandoned any pretence that the Xbox will be home to software that isn't restricted by region, and as highlighted last issue, mod-chips aren't confined to Sony. Perhaps the lesson that both should learn is that if software was region free, it would be easier to distinguish between those who are intent on piracy, and those who simply want to enjoy games as they are released.



Now legal in Australia, the much-maligned Messiah chip. It remains illegal to use it in this country though

Edinburgh Games Festival on the cards

Industry movers and shakers meet in Scotland's capital to discuss an 'alternative' industry event



Videogames may still be on the media fringe but a new event to run alongside the Edinburgh Festival should help matters

You don't often find videogames going hand-in-hand with stilt-walking dwarves, avant-garde escapologists and crass comedians, but at this year's Edinburgh Festival, Tiga got together with industry stalwarts to flesh out proposals for an annual games event to run alongside the popular Scottish fête.

Cultural riches

The proposed name of the event is to be the Edinburgh International Games Festival and is likely to run in the second week of August for two days from 2003. Attendees at the initial meeting included Fred Hasson (Tiga), Roger Bennett (ELSPA), Chris van der Kuyl (VIS Entertainment) and Nigel Davies (Blitz Games). The event is to extol the diversity and cultural richness of videogames and, longterm, is expected to become an international forum attracting worldwide participation and attendance.

Funding is likely to come from Scottish Enterprise and though specific methods are still a little sketchy, the Edinburgh International Games Festival will demonstrate the popularity of the form in a bid to attract outside investment. Providing a stronger platform to lobby the governmen[t] on major issues will also be key. "ELSPA fully supports the view that computer and videogames provide a valuable contribution to the nations cultural and social development," says **Mike Rawlinson** of ELSPA. "We hope that this event will be able to demonstrate these values and increase people's understanding and appreciation of the gaming phenomena."

Clearly much has yet to be finalised, bu[t] Tiga does want annual awards to go to particularly creative games, debates, 'screenings' of new games and a more conducive atmosphere to encourage networking with creatives from the film, television and music industries. If such ambitions are reached then the Edinburgh International Games Festival should stand out from other trade events.

GDCE kicks off as Edge goes to press

Successful first day bodes well for consequent introduction of consumer element to ECTS

As half of the **Edge** office prepares to decamp to the capital in preparation for the annual fusion of schmoozing, alcohol, deceitful teenagers and the odd videogame that is ECTS, the other half is already at GDCE, which commenced just as this issue goes to press. It's a promising sign that attendance figures show an increase compared to last year's event, though it remains to be seen how well the changed format of ECTS – complete with consumer-focused PlayStation Experience in a bid to drive down the numbers of those deceitful teenagers – will be received.

The first day of GDCE, however, was a promising start for the twin exhibitions, which run concurrently from August 27–31 at Earl's Court Conference Centre. Devoted to sponsored tutorials and the IGDA Academic Summit, a panel discussion regarding the relationship between academic research and how it might benefit the development community was the highlight of the day. The rest of the line-up promises to rival last year's in terms of offering a wide-ranging schedule of panels, lectures and discussions (with **Edge**'s own contribution to a panel devoted to deciding upon the best game of all time – which is *Rogue*, by the way).



Daniel Liatowitsch (above), the director of 'Avatars Offline', a film shown at GDCE

Another highlight is likely to be the lunchtime screening of 'Avatars Offline', an independent film by Daniel Liatowitsch devoted to the phenomenon of the MMRPG, which was previewed at the Game Developers Conference last March. For those who were unable to attend, the film is available to buy on DVD from the film's official Website priced $24.99 (£16). Visit http://www.avatarsoffline.com

Elsewhere, at ECTS no major announcements or surprises are expected, but the publisher turnout is significantly healthier than last year, with the likes of Electronic Arts, Activision, Konami, Capcom, THQ, Eidos, Ubi Soft, Acclaim, Infogrames, Midway, Rage and Codemasters all putting in an appearance.





Some of the faces featured in the film: author Janet H Murray (top left), NCSoft's Jake Song (top right), and Lord British

With last year's event characterised by an apathetic response and the non-appearance of any of the major console manufacturers, such a line-up, as well as this year's introduction of the PlayStation Experience, can only be a boon, providing an opportunity for publishers to build momentum for Christmas period, courting retail buyers and public alike.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Super Mario Sunshine	GC	Nintendo	In-house	9
Breath of Fire II	GBA	Ubi Soft	Capcom	8
Medieval Total War	PC	Activision	Creative Assembly	8
Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos	PC	Vivendi Universal	Blizzard	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	GC	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	7
ZooCube	GC, GBA	Acclaim	PuzzleKings/Coyote	7
Dino Stalker	PS2	Capcom	In-house	6
Stuntman	PS2	Infogrames	Reflections	5
Capcom vs SNK 2 EO	GC	Capcom	In-house	3
Enclave	Xbox	Swing!	Starbreeze Studios	3



Super Mario Sunshine



Breath of Fire II



Medieval Total War



Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos

CUTTINGS



Treasure confirms GameCube Ikaruga

Although it's long been expected, Treasure has finally confirmed that the spiritual successor to eBay darling, *Radiant Silvergun*, will be released for Nintendo's GameCube, joining the previously confirmed versions for Dreamcast and Naomi hardware some time next year. Although this is several months after the other versions, it's also been confirmed that the title won't be appearing on PlayStation2 at all, owing to its architectural differences to the Naomi board.

Sony fears slump in sales

According to an interview in the Wall Street Journal, SCEI president, Ken Kutaragi, is worried that broader economic concerns may undermine the success of the PlayStation2 over the coming Christmas period. In particular, he pointed to the threat of a slowing US economy, though he did prove bullish about the threat of Sony's competitors, dismissing the idea of a price-cut should Microsoft reduce the price of its console in the region. Nevertheless, Sony continues to cement its hegemony in Japan, with sales of the PS2 showing an increase of 160 per cent compared to this time last year. Still, at least Datamonitor has provided Microsoft with some cheer, by releasing figures suggesting that by the end of 2005, it will have shipped some 35 million Xboxes.

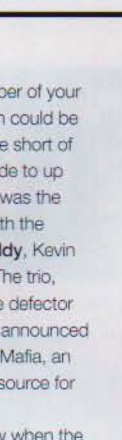
Console upgrades rumoured

The latest rumours doing the rounds regarding Nintendo's Game Boy Advance are suggesting that a revised version of the handheld could be on sale in Japan by the end of the year. Although claims have emerged that a backlit variant could be on its way, it's probably more likely that Nintendo will simply improve the display and implement a contrast control. Meanwhile, Microsoft's also been working on optimising its console hardware, with a Reuters report suggesting that a Californian manufacturer is to produce a more cost-efficient video chip for the console – confirming earlier rumours that the company is seeking to reduce manufacturing costs (**E**113).

www.codemafia.co.uk

Graphics by mob rule

They used to work for nVidia, but the men behind newly formed graphics specialist Code Mafia have thrown their weight behind ATI



To lose one senior member of your developer support team could be seen as careless but it's little short of disastrous when three decide to up and leave en masse. Such was the situation faced by nVidia with the departures of **Richard Huddy**, Kevin Strange and Dave Horne. The trio, joined by Criterion Software defector John Spackman, promptly announced they were setting up Code Mafia, an outsource programming resource for PC and Xbox developers.

But worse was to follow when the company signed an exclusive developer support partnership with nVidia archrival ATI. Imagine Pires, Vieira and Henry jumping ship to Tottenham and you get some idea of what's involved.

Richard Huddy remains sanguine, however. "As nVidia grew, it became more corporate, more hierarchical and less spontaneous," he says. "It's not necessarily a bad thing for a company but as a matter of personal taste, I find the small company style of living and working much more fun. And if your life's not mainly about fun then it's time for a change… I firmly believe that."

As for the decision to work for ATI, he says this was purely driven by the fact that the founders of Code Mafia believed it had the best approach towards developer relations. "ATI is taking a really constructive attitude," Huddy explains. "It doesn't try to lock developers or publishers into co-marketing deals and it's not trying to tie games into its proprietary technology. Instead it gives free access to new graphics technology and wants to make our expertise available to game developers all over Europe."

It's tough talk, considering the effort nVidia is taking to persuade game developers to adopt its Cg PC programming language. But Huddy prefers the dual and non-proprietary approaches of Microsoft's High-Level Shading Language as implemented in DirectX and the proposed OpenGL 2.0 API as the way forward.

"Right now the current consumer chips such as GeForce4 and Radeon 8500 are often underexploited because the art and asset-creation part of the development process isn't using the new technical capabilities aggressively enough," says Huddy. "This means apps like Max and Maya need beefing up in a whole host of ways if games are going to keep getting better and better. OpenGL 2.0 is critical to that."

Technology wars

And as longtime supporter of Microsoft's DirectX, Huddy is also keen on that technology's particular game development focus. "DirectX moves forward faster than OpenGL by an order of magnitude, and gives great access to the R&D which takes place in the best graphics architecture teams around the world," he says.

But away from the intricacies of the technology wars, Code Mafia's modus operandi is purely to help developers, both PC and Xbox, make better games. "I think British developers in particular seem to be really good at mixing up new gaming ideas with a willingness to exploit technology and bring a fresh approach to game development," he says. "The industry is gradually moving to an outsourcing model. At Code Mafia, we offer developers the chance to help out with the highly specialised job of graphics implementation, letting them focus on making great games."

It's in the cards

Of course, it just so happens that Code Mafia's move to ATI occurs just as the company is releasing its Radeon 9700 graphics card, which is the first to support Microsoft's DirectX 9.0 graphics standard. "Without a doubt, it's the best graphics chip around right now," confirms Richard Huddy. "But even without the Radeon 9700, the commitment ATI is willing to make to the development community make it stand out among the competition."

One of the key DirectX 9.0 features is full floating point programmability for pixel shaders across the graphic card's eight rendering pipelines. The board's 256bit memory interface gives a maximum bandwidth of over 2Gb/second and the chip supports up to 256Mb of DDR memory. The colour accuracy per channel is also an impressive 32bits, while ATI claims twice the performance of nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 running the OpenGL-developed game *Serious Sam* at a resolution of 1600 x 1200.



The first job for Code Mafia will be helping PC developers work with ATI's latest and most powerful graphic card, the Radeon 9700, which is the first card to support DirectX 9.0 functionality, notably fully programmable rendering pipelines







Serious Sam developer Croteam supported ATI's Truform with a game patch: helping developers to deliver such features is Code Mafia's bread and butter. John Carmack, currently working on *Doom III*, is also a fan of ATI, which is why ATI hardware powered the game at E3

www.renderware.com

Pump up the volume

Another string is added to the RenderWare bow with the release of a new audio component for PlayStation2

As is the case with most technical aspects of PlayStation2, getting to grips with its 48-channel SPU2 sound chip can be tricky. Thankfully though, help is on the way with the release of RenderWare Audio version 2.0 for PlayStation2. Adding to the already comprehensive rendering and dynamic components of Criterion's RenderWare Platform means that developers should be able to accomplish higher quality games, working within the same development framework.

One particularly important feature to be included in Audio 2.0 is the integration of Dolby's Pro Logic II surround sound technology. Previously, this had only been available on PlayStation2 for non-interactive game elements such as cut-scenes. Now, however, audio designers will be able to use it in a realtime manner. And because GameCube also supports Pro Logic II, with Xbox supporting Dolby 5.1, this means it is much easier for designers to maintain a coherent implementation of their work across all gaming platforms.

Raise the bar

"Gamers expect the same level of audio in games as they would for movies, so developers and publishers need to be able to raise the bar of their game sound," explains **Adam Billyard**, Criterion's chief technology officer. "Our focus is to empower developers with the best audio tools so they can exploit each game platforms' unique strengths and features, gaining the maximum effects in the minimum time. Using version 2.0 of RenderWare Audio, developers can bypass the audio learning curve for PlayStation2."

Another key enhancement is the ability to stream audio across the Input/Output Processor (IOP), instead of using the PlayStation2's Emotion Engine CPU. This frees up limited system resources, as much of the Emotion Engine's processing time is taken up dealing with scene management and tasks such as physics and AI calculations. Improvements have also been made to RenderWare Audio's wave dictionary editing and memory management features.

Built as an open and modular system, version 2.0 allows developers to choose what features they wish to implement using the package's API. RenderWare Audio is designed to work straight out the box too, requiring as little programming input as possible so audio designers can get on with doing their job.

Curse lifted for sound

One of the games currently in development using RenderWare Audio is Asylum Games' *Curse: The Eye of Isis*. Although RenderWare Audio can be implemented without using RenderWare's graphics component, unsurprisingly it makes more sense to use them in conjunction, which is what Asylum is doing. "RenderWare Audio offers the features we require to get games finished to the highest quality. And having the same interface as the rendering side is obviously a consideration as well," explains sound designer **George Jeganathan**. "As tools such as RenderWare become industry standard, there's no reason why any developer, even those developing smaller budget titles, shouldn't have access to the best tools."

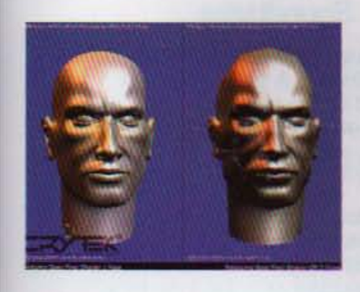


You can't hear just how good Asylum's *Curse: The Eye of Isis* is but thanks to RenderWare Audio it should be sounding even better when it's released

www.crytek.de

More from less

Crytek's PolyBump utility promises to improve the quality of in-game objects thanks to a clever algorithm





The PolyBump Reviewer (above) enables artists to interactively check the quality of their in-game objects to the original high-res version. The man of the right consists of about 170 times as many polygons as his PolyBump version on the left, demonstrating the power of the tool (above right)



Crytek's PolyBump was developed to help in the creation of its game *Far Cry*

Not content with making its game engine, CryEngine, available to license for developers, German studio Crytek is releasing a modelling tool for PC, Xbox and GameCube. Currently working on the anticipated FPS *Far Cry* (previously the *X-Isle* demo), the studio claims its PolyBump tool will enable developers to run pre-rendered-quality models in their games while lowering processing overheads.

Foundation course

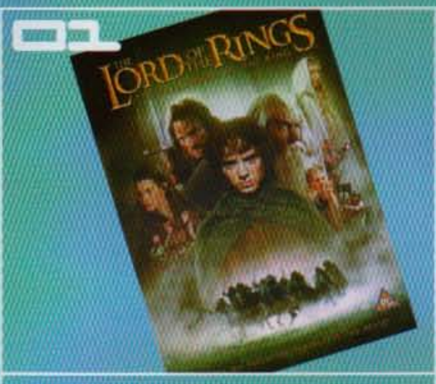
PolyBump does this using a high-resolution model as a foundation and creating an extremely low polygon model from it, while maintaining much of the image quality of the high polygon model. Taking the two images as an input, the PolyBump algorithm calculates a normal map, which transform the high poly model into the low poly model. This map can then be applied in conjunction with the low poly model in-game. Obviously, it takes much less processing time to render the lower quality model, which means developers can have more better looking models in a scene, while the fewer polygons per object means less memory traffic and faster framerates.

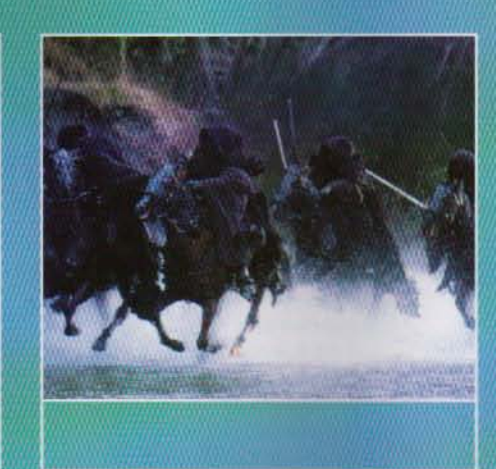
As part of the toolkit, there's also a PolyBump plug-in for 3ds max, which works in such a way that artists can continue to use max while the plug-in does its calculations in the background. Using the plug-in, artists can save the normal map in any format supported by 3ds max.

Other features include support for merging a bump map with the normal map to generate the better surface definition for in-game objects. In addition, the PolyBump viewer lets artists compare the low poly and high poly models under different lighting conditions. Particular attention is paid to the performance of pixel shader technology. Evaluation copies of PolyBump are currently available from the Crytek Website.



OUT THERE
REPORTAGE





The 'Lord of the Rings' DVD extras show how clever everyone was. Expect another edition in November



Games Workshop's strategy game is a simplified version of greater work. So, a bit like the film then



Games Central reckons these static *SSX Tricky* characters will be the most popular...



Edge begs to differ. Arai. Mee Mee. Plastic spheres. Surely toys don't get any more exciting

01 Lord of the free things

UK: "One of the most spectacular films ever made… a movie sensation" – said the 'Independent on Sunday'.
"The best fantasy epic in motion picture history" – said 'Empire'.
"Stupendous" – said the 'News of the World'.
"Disappointing" – said **Edge**.

It would seem that it's not just the **Edge** letters pages (and our online forums) that have recently been buzzing with 'The Lord of the Rings' fever. It's been almost impossible to avoid the release of the 'theatrical cut' of the movie on DVD, which comes complete with a preview of the forthcoming EA game based on the movie. And not that anyone's taking advantage of blind devotion or anything, but this will be followed, in November, by the DVD release of an 'extended cut' version. In any case, we still don't like the film, and not just because we didn't get sent any free DVDs. And you know we're right not to.

We were, though, quietly impressed with Games Workshop's strategy battle game, and not just because we were sent a free copy. The rulebook reads like a primer for the company's more advanced products ('Warhammer'-lite, if you like) complete with painting and modelling guides, but it's entertaining enough in its own right. Sadly, owing to pressing deadlines, **Edge** hasn't quite got round to painting our 'Men of Gondor' yet. But we will.

02 Balls to retailers

UK: Those who just can't get enough of *Super Monkey Ball* will be pleased to hear that a range of videogame toys – already available in the US – are to launch in the UK this September. Appearing under the Joyride brand and distributed by Games Central, the range will also include *SSX Tricky*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Fighter 4* characters, all at £10 each. But surely none of them will come close to harassing pets with Mee Mee in a plastic sphere. Call Games Central on 01707 379340 for more.

Soundbytes

"The value of shooting is learning disciplines in a proper way as opposed to the ersatz disciplines of videogames."
Rural affairs minister Alun Michael on why shooting is better for children than playing games.

"Yep, if you skate backwards with one of the female skaters, you will very quickly notice that their funbags fight like excited puppies in a sack."
Acclaim's review of *Aggressive Inline Skating* before going on to give it 9/10 in its 'Rumbled' magazine.

"Old Skool. New Skool. Either way someone's getting a skoolin'."
What? Marketing gibberish on the latest American *Sega GT 2002* ads.

"Not since 1066 has it been so hot in London."
But Hastings was much cooler. Bam! Entertainment's Cat Channon introduces *Reign of Fire* to the press.

03 Fishy game testing

UK: Stalk, ghillie, line, tippet, drag and flies. **Edge** was admittedly a bit bemused by the phone call inviting a staff member over to a secret location to test out *The Virtual Flyfishing Experience* with a number of expert flyfishermen. It may not have the added sensory feedback of *Sega Bass Fishing*'s peripheral but a great deal more technical and practical know-how has clearly gone into making it the most comprehensive flyfishing simulation in existence. A bold boast. Developed by Virtual Solo Sports, the game lets PC fishermen determine factors such as a floating or intermediate line and whether to take advice from the virtual ghillie. No release date is set but **Edge** will get back to you if the fishy game testing session proves successful.

04 Reading classics

US: Nintendo will have launched its GBA Card-e-reader in the US by the time you read this. To promote the device a number of cards are available encoded with classic NES titles. Initial games include *Donkey Kong Jr. Balloon Fight*, *Pinball*, *Tennis* and *Excitebike*. Although individual cards retail for $5, the Card-e-reader itself launches with one of the above games, three *Pokémon* e-cards, an *Animal Crossing* e-card and one Game & Watch e-card game (*Manhole*) for $40. Just don't forget to take out the cards out of your back pocket before the weekly wash.

05 The fluid doctor

UK: It happens every time, and right in the middle of 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now'. Skip. Garbled Morrissey is bad for the concentration at any time. Which means the **Edge** art editor gets to monopolise the CD player with mildly offensive gangsta rap all month. Enter Digital Innovations' GameDoctor CD and DVD repair kit (distributed by Pinpoint Digital Systems). Put simply, a quick squirt of fluid and a full rotation in the device and the **Edge** office airwaves are once again filled with the unfettered brilliance of Manchester's most famous miserablist. Oh, and it repairs game disks, too. The GameDoctor will launch in September for £30.

Data Stream

Percentage of people that believe learning to shoot is better for children than playing videogames, according to a Countryside Alliance survey: **77**

Best performing publisher in Japan during 2002, based on number of game titles in the top ten: **Nintendo**

Number of Nintendo titles that have appeared in the Japanese top ten charts so far this year: **16**

Title Sega is rumoured to be showing at the upcoming AOU show in Japan this September: ***OutRun 2***

Amount of money a Berkeley student is alleged to have fraudulently taken from gullible eBay users by advertising non-existent electrical goods: **$190,000 (£123,000)**

Home country the Berkeley student is said to have fled to: **Turkey**

Total weight of pasta Buca di Beppo produced on August 22 in San Francisco to help Nintendo promote the upcoming launch of *Mario Sunshine*: **2,700lb**

Real name of pop star who failed to evict an alleged cyber squatter who owns the Website address: www.sting.com: **Gordon Sumner**

Amount Sting alleged that the cyber squatter offered to sell the Web address to him for: **$25,000 (£16,500)**

03



Edge is still uncertain about the intricacies of flyfishing, but we're certainly willing to try





Apparently, if things are going slowly by the river bank you can ask advice from the virtual ghillie

04






Excitebike is just one of the e-card games released for Nintendo's Card-e-card reader. More next year



Pokémon cards? Pah. Now you can collect classics like *Donkey Kong Jr.* as part of Nintendo's new range

05



Yes, it may look like Slave I, but a quick squirt of fluid will do wonders for all those skipping disks



Now a revered object in the **Edge** office, the GameDr has put an end to much gangsta rap

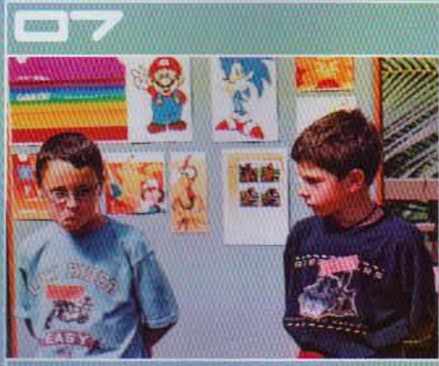


The *Sonic Mega Collection*: another cynical retro cash-in, or keeping videogame history alive?





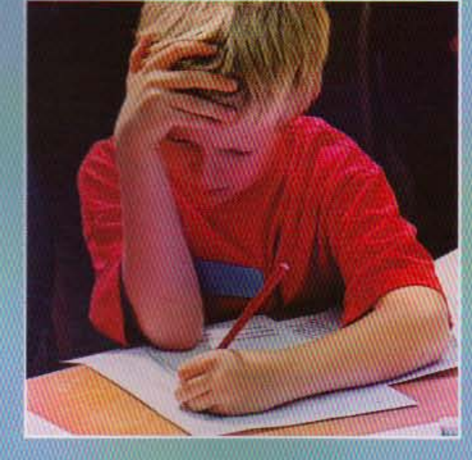
Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine, a stunning take on *Puyo Puyo* and worth the asking price alone



Meet the next generation of Peter Molyneuxs. Their game designs were said to be very, very cool



After the pen-and-paper workshops everyone got together to record the music for *GTAIII: Vice City*







Appropriately, the *Space Invaders* game lets you smash saucers to win a weekend in a Greek hotel

06 Sonic boom

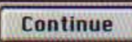
Japan: MAME may be bringing arcade classics back to life for PC owners (see p76) but there's still plenty of retro packages on the way for those with a mere console. Sega's *Sonic Mega Collection* for GC is to be released in Japan in time for Christmas and in the UK by early 2003. It will feature *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*, *Sonic & Knuckles*, *Sonic 3D Flickies' Island* and *Sonic the Hedgehog Spinball*. But more importantly, the masterful *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* will also return to delight new and old audiences alike.

07 'Game On' for schools

UK: From August 3–6 the Barbican exhibition centre held special 'Game On' Family Workshops to give children the opportunity to design videogames. Led by professional musicians, writers and artists the workshops were incredibly popular and eased youngsters through the processes of designing a modern videogame. Those who missed out will be pleased to know that the Paul Hamlyn Foundation awarded 'Game On' £40,000 to continue the scheme into next year. Teachers will be able to download special education packs that will hopefully encourage pupils into designing some off-the-wall concepts for the industry. Go to http://www.gameonweb.co.uk/education for more.

08 Space Invaders World Cup

UK: Developed by Fotis Chatzinikos on his Developers Gallery Website, the *Space Invaders* World Cup offers you the chance to win prizes such as a GeForce4 graphics card and even a weekend in a Greek hotel. Running until September 30 the competition uses an update of Taito's classic game and was developed as an exercise in the versatility of OpenGL. Go to http://www.dev-gallery.com to record your score.



Lionhead's new satellite company
Not a baad move
Price wars
A hardware Christmas bonanza for consumers
Print videogame fanzines
Blessed are the **Edge** forum users

Quit

The autumn/winter release schedule
Too many games, too many short-sighted publishers
Lack of terrestrial videogame programmes
Leaving 'Game-Pad 3' to champion the cause
Acclaim's 'Rumbled' magazine
Can the industry be dumbed-down any further?



MEDIA

09 Redemption Ark

Alastair Reynolds is developing a habit of writing huge sci-fi books. His latest, 'Redemption Ark' (567 large pages), trumps previous efforts, 'Chasm City' (528 pages) and 'Revelation Space' (475 pages). Good thing he's also becoming one of the UK's best. Easy to turn, every one of those pages fixes the attention with the scope of an unfolding vision.

Following from what's gone before, 'Redemption Ark' brings together various strands of characters and situations into something that could be construed as, at least, a logical conclusion. On one hand there's Khouri and the humane war criminal Triumvir Volyova positioned on one side of space with their plague-ridden spaceship, in whose hold sit the cache of Hell-weapons. On the other are the Hive-like Conjoiners. The most complex race in the universe, it is about to defeat a set of long-term enemies, only to discover something more deadly is about to strike at all intelligent life. Cue the defection of one their finest minds, Clavain, who seeks the Hell-weapons himself in a desperate bid to deflect the seemingly inevitable. Other powers and principalities flit in and out of focus as a broad struggle develops for the future.

Moving from character to character – there's no clear hero/anti-hero dynamic – Reynolds continues building the scope of his world: something he will clearly be returning to. Series newbies won't feel too out of place, though: at worst merely anxious to check out the back catalogue. Taken together, such attributes are surely the mark of a writer gearing up to top form.

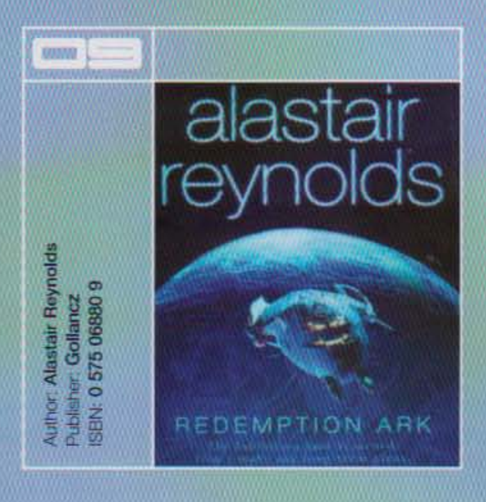
10 Once More, With Feeling

Edge doesn't normally review books about hardcore porn. But in this case we'll make an exception. When Victoria Coren and Charlie Skelton (poker player extraordinaire and vicar's son respectively) decided that they wanted to make a hardcore porn film, they turned to Fourth Estate for funding. But it was **Edge** columnist Steven Poole that they turned to when they needed a soundtrack for their magnum pornus. And so we feel obliged to review 'Once more, with feeling: How we tried to make the greatest porn film ever'.

Of course the porn's really just a pretext for an entertainingly droll account of human behaviour and self-discovery, which all proves really rather edifying. Starting off at Vicky's house, taking in a spot of 'Rocco's Anal Ski Vacation' before traversing the highs and lows of the porn industry via Las Vegas and Amsterdam, our two ingenues decide to make a film. Appropriately enough, 'The Naughty Twins' proves to be about a couple of ingenues, on a voyage of discovery and an exploration of human sexuality and love, featuring actors such as 'Karel, the floral greetings card designer' and 'Martina, the German dominatrix' and a cast list that boasts 'Dr Osiris, the flamboyant villain' and 'Uncle Siegfried, the stern yet kindly uncle'. Which is pretty indicative of the overall tone of both this book and porno-within-a-book.

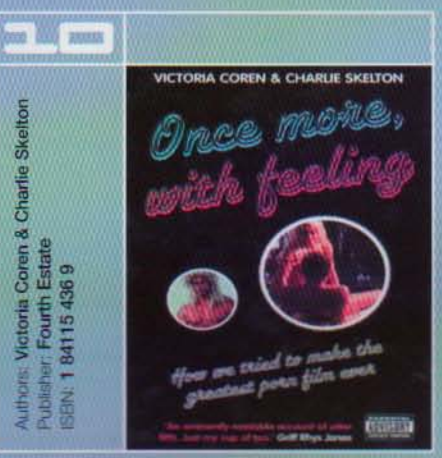
And though the authors might have fallen short of their stated goal of making the greatest porn film ever (they might not have failed – **Edge** has yet to see the finished product), they've certainly produced one of the most entertaining boy-girl true-life comedies in a while.

09



Author: **Alastair Reynolds**
Publisher: **Gollancz**
ISBN: **0 575 06880 9**

10



Authors: **Victoria Coren & Charlie Skelton**
Publisher: **Fourth Estate**
ISBN: **1 84115 436 9**

11



Site: **Steve McKenna's 8bit Movie Challenge**
URL: **http://www.monkeon.co.uk/moviechallenge/**

11 Website of the month

Edge is fairly sure that this Website isn't actually the brainchild of the real Steve McKenna from the axed Channel 5 'Movie Chart Show', but we're still rather impressed. Like some modern day *Tetris*, it's based on a remarkably simple concept, yet boasts considerable depth. Unlike *Tetris*, it's fronted by the warped visage of a z-list celebrity, and consists of a series of (well, five) simple multiple choice questions based on Spectrum or C64 film tie-ins. Correctly identifying all five screenshots or characters will grant you access to Steve's Hollywood gallery – but be warned; for each wrong answer, he'll spoil the end of a well-known movie. Our only complaint would be that questions tend to come round too often, but for the opportunity to see Steve's crazy paving, that's a price we're willing to pay.

12 Advertainment

Japan: Even if you ignore the ludicrous quotes **Edge** has obtained for import versions of *Tekki*, the official PAL release is expected to set you back a substantial sum. Then again, someone has to pay for the advert...



Man in 'Mad Max'-styled environment frantically fires up his machinery, eager for battle...



He steps violently on a pedal, the machine surges forward, his hands confidently on the controls.



Battle commences. The brutal sound of heavy artillery drowns out most of the screaming.



A quick twitch of the finger and missiles are released but things aren't going well for our virtual warrior...



"Rhaaaaaaaaa!" he shouts as he sustains critical damage. Alarms warn of impending doom.



Sensing the critical nature of his situation he initiates the eject sequence. The 'cockpit' vibrates violently.



The *Tekki* logo shows up, followed by the price (¥19,800). We leave our hero in his crumbling den.

Ratch. Ratch. The sound bounces off the brick walls of the alley. It sounds like someone's sole scraping along the floor, but RedEye turns and there is no one there. He goes back to thinking about the dentist. Heads…

It is 3am in the north west of London, a Wednesday morning after a Tuesday night media launch in a Hoxton bar. Waste of time. Not meaning to stir, but it was kind of like *Final Fantasy*, as it happens. Interminably dull conversations with wannabe poets – where's the skip button, damn you – and not so much a plot as a series of predictable events leading to the same old conclusion. Only this time the inevitable ending isn't an epic/interminable blow-by-blow battle with a father possessed, but flirting, a chase for loose morals and double vision. And a long, lonely walk home.

The alley isn't really a shortcut, but provides daytime respite from the traffic. At 3am that gets home, at which point he puts on the kettle, kicks back in front of *Rez*, stops panting and starts thinking.

Random encounters are based on chance, and chance has a bad reputation in videogames. In fact, random is practically a swear word, not just down to those oft-abused encounters, but a whole world of gaming pain. Illustrate: RedEye recalls a PR person demonstrating a spectacular vehicle combat moneypit. It looks glorious and plays like shit. She steers around, firing weapons and pointing out the beautifully depicted explosions. "It's brilliant," she says. "So fast and frenetic. You die, and you can't even tell why. It's totally random." And she giggles, turns back to the screen, and screeches her car around some more inexplicable death. Pointless. Flip a coin. Random.

If we can't control whether we're successful at the game, there's not much point in playing. We wasting a few more minutes of your life chasing fractional power-ups. But you can't select 'flee'.

You see, just like the apologists explain, the fights are necessary to level up, a lot like saying that in order to meet an attractive dentist you have to contrive a cavity. There is always Another Way. Total scripting? There is an argument that suggests combat should be carefully constructed, that every fight sequence should be balletically conceived and played out as clinically as a Hollywood blockbuster. That vision leads to everyone getting the same controlled experience played out by automatons, and, insofar as a panting, shaking RedEye can see, that isn't the answer either. We don't want to eliminate the unexpected, just to be fooled that it's worth something.

It's simple. We should be hypnotised by circumstance, always under the impression that each battle is a deliberate test from cunning coders;



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Inevitability: can we leave everything to chance?

shouldn't be a consideration, but it is not really like RedEye is in a fit state to consider much at the moment. It is dark. He is drunk. When you are drunk you notice the small things, and your mind flicks through them like flash cards, mixes them with the past and the night. The way the fire escapes creak as the road sways, the way she smiled at the coin and the light glinted from the anglepoise that made her halo, and the way chewing gum ground into the pavement makes constellations on the tarmac. The way it is so very, very dark. Ratch. Ratch. But there is no one there. It was heads. It had to be heads.

Ratch. RedEye quickens his pace. Ratch, once more, louder this time, a scuffle of leather and then they're in front of him. Wouldn't you know it? A night written from start to finish by the serial sequentialopaths from Square, and RedEye finds himself in a random battle. They pause; goodness, it might even be turn based. Two in front, one behind. RedEye weighs up his options. Selects 'flee'. He runs.

And that's it, sadly. There is no dramatic end to the story, though a flourish of words could produce something cute on the page – and let's not pretend RedEye isn't thinking of embellishments as his feet take flight – but that wouldn't be fair. RedEye just runs, dodging to the left of the two, across a road, and far away. He doesn't stop or turn around until he cannot duck a punch we don't know is coming, which is why so many people find Square's random battles so offensive. "But that's real life," RedEye's devil's advocate smirks. "You've no idea what's in the alley." Fair enough, but actually, a substantial part of *Final Fantasy*'s irritation comes from random encounters' lack of randomness: their presence isn't random, just sickeningly inevitable. When you are in open ground, you can count the seconds between them, and just as you exhale, the screen swirls, there's a brief loading pause, and you're stood on a field with three impeccably polite monsters waiting for you to hit them. Select flee?

"We should be always under the impression that each battle is a deliberate test from cunning coders; that we are to blame"

RedEye thinks. You could call the combat random: beneath the pretty colours and swirling summons there are a thousand monkeys rolling a thousand dice to find out if you hit or miss. The odds are weighted so much in your favour that they are rarely life threatening, just a tedious number exercise to boost your character's statistics. The odds are so weighted, in fact – they have to be, because even Square are aware that random death is much worse than random combat – that the enemies amount to cannon fodder. The fear you get for the visual swirl that signals another battle isn't one of death, it's that we are to blame for the situation we find ourselves in, and that when we are dismissing foes we are eliminating something of substance, not just making up the playtime by chewing on the same old combat gristle. Tonight wasn't scripted, but it wasn't exactly random, either, it just had a measure of the unexpected. Tonight RedEye knew something was coming, perhaps thanks to the same sixth sense that failed him for the coin last month, or more likely just an assailant lacking grace, subtlety and quiet shoes. More than that, tonight it was RedEye's choice to get drunk, his choice to go down the alley, and his choice to run. A real world neutered of every danger would be a poor, stoic place, and replicating that sort of things in games is good – the feeling you get wandering around the town in *Silent Hill 2*, for example. But being mugged *Final Fantasy*-style every time you head out across open ground, forced to take part in a five-minute combat charade so you stand a chance against larger enemies later? That's not adrenaline, not even fear. It's just inevitable. Flee.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Decadence: is the videogame industry ready to move forward?

Perhaps videogames have hit a brick wall. Perhaps they are in their decadent period, desperately drawing attention to themselves by superficial tricks but ultimately, and secretly, convinced of the impoverishment and exhaustion of their traditional forms. The decadent period among artists and writers of the late 19th century gave birth to a new aesthetic flowering in modernism. Can we hope that the same will be true of videogames?

I am playing *TOCA Race Driver*. Now on the one hand it is true for driving games that an increase in visual quality – all other things being equal – means an increase in the pleasure to be had from the game, since the exhilaration of speeding through well-modelled and detailed environments is central to the genre. So I am not unduly worried that, essentially, this is *TOCA 2* prettied up. I am happy to believe that there is more hardcore physical modelling going on under the hood; and the sheer brutal refinement of the game's racing philosophy, its all-encompassing noise, the way you can almost smell the petrol: all this is just fine. What does worry me is the feeling of desperation about the narrative that has been bolted on. It's as if to say, "Well, hell, where else can the driving game go? Search us. How about we pretend you're a bestubbled, lantern-jawed young punk who wants to avenge his father?"

Well, why not? I've been a bestubbled, lantern-jawed young punk in more games than I care to remember. Why start whining now? One reason might be that the disjunction between what you do in the game – stare through a windscreen and try to hold the racing line – and what 'you' do in the cut-scenes is simply too wide. The ways in which we can play with character in videogames are limited enough in most RPG or exploration games, but in a driving game they are close to nonexistent.

Another reason – and this is what gave me that whiff of decadence – is the hard limitation of the game's ability to comment on how you drive. During one early race I said hello to a gravel trap on the last lap and watched the other cars speed by me. Rather than hobble in last, I decided to play around with the damage-simulation system, driving back and forth around the last segment of track and crashing into walls as often as I could. Soon the racetrack was littered with body panels, sprockets, broken glass and burned rubber. Satisfied, I finally drove over the finish line. Did my kindly Cockney manager say a single word about my utterly bizarre and irresponsible behaviour? No, of course he didn't. So why should I suspend my disbelief in the game's strenuous attempts at narrative for a moment longer?

This is not a new problem, and as I have written before, it seems to be a fundamental bust to the dream of videogames providing 'interactive stories', at least until some major revolution in artificial intelligence happens. But every year that goes by when that revolution doesn't happen, while so many other things are getting better – visual quality, technical skill – is another year down the decadent slope. Games are fiddling while Rome burns.

More decadent yet is the GameCube remake of *Resident Evil*. Now it can hardly be denied that in terms of its visual aesthetics, this is a game of astounding gothic beauty. The lightning flashes through the leaded windows; the pervasive sense of decay and dread in the plush and – yes – decadent architecture of the mansion; the almost melancholic character of the zombies' expressive shuffle; the exquisite sound design and beautiful musical score; all these things are worthy of the highest praise. But the game still plays like it did the first time round on PlayStation. Oh, so I have the fancy new 180-degree turn now? Thanks. That will take my mind off the fact that the game is still a notorious tissue of incoherencies: one-use objects to solve brain-dead 'puzzles'; the hysterically dumb inventory-management system of 'item boxes'; the retrograde control system (it's like *Devil May Cry* never happened).

Maybe there is an argument to the effect that *Resident Evil*'s idiosyncratic combination of controls and camera angles works to create a kind of Brechtian alienation in the player. The fact that I view my avatar from the other end of a long corridor and so can't see the slavering undead beast I am trying to shoot makes me ponder constructively the very artificiality of the videogame form and my dual role as ludological player and cinematic viewer. Maybe. But it's also very annoying. Even if you like *Resident Evil* (perhaps you have a door fetish or something), it must still be admitted that a remake of a six-year-old game that offers a few nice new areas and rejigged puzzles but utterly fails to update the central play mechanics is a game that is turning its back on the future and wallowing decadently in past glories.

Other decadent games? Look around. *Wave Race: Blue Storm*: a calculated, lurid assault on the memory of the original's elegance; a loud ultra-Americanisation of a classic game. *Agent Under Fire*: a riot of colourful, prescripted incident with no real action. *Dead or Alive 3*: a cynical attempt to attract little boys to demo pods in Dixons. Decadence in videogames means avoiding the obvious problems: not fixing the engine but respraying the body. We'll still have to pull levers and find keys but, so the decadent videogame imagines, we'll be happy if we have bigger guns, better lights and more leaves on the trees. Or, like, a really good story.

Decadent videogames are by no means bad games per se; but they lack artistic honesty. It is possible, indeed, that things will have to get worse before they get better, that decadence will have to reach a brilliant, self-destructive peak. In that respect, maybe the scorched-earth policy of a Kojima, a genius close to self-immolation in his apocalyptic personal cinema, is a sign of light at the end of the tunnel.

"The decadent period of the 19th century gave birth to modernism. Can we hope that the same will be true of videogames?"

So here I sit in my velvet smoking jacket, leafing languidly through a volume of Oscar Wilde's witticisms, and wondering when this decadent period – of superficial invention and a desire to dazzle, to distract or to shock above all else – will eventually pass. *Soldier of Fortune II*? How perfectly outrageous, darling. *Doom III*? Looks very nice, doesn't it? In the heat and humidity of a late summer, I try to stifle a yawn.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

As usual, I'm so busy and I feel so... frustrated. When I feel frustrated, my organisation gets dizzy. And when my organisation gets dizzy, that has a terrible impact on my work. That can't continue, so it's a good opportunity to sit back, and take a little time to think about a few things. So I'd like to talk about the way I handle my team, combined with how I lead the game creation process. Let's start...

Not understanding something and not realising something are two different things. I think you can feel the difference. 'Not understanding something' is about you – it's active. I mean *you* don't understand something, and it is up to you to make the discovery. 'Not realising something' is very different, as it means you have no perception of your environment. Imagine you are walking and there is a stone in front of you on the road. If you notice it you can avoid it, but if you don't you could fall.

Another time, I found someone was taking too many vacations, but I thought this was because of the intense work. It was like I was making an excuse for my own lack of reaction.

I should have spoken. In the first case, we ended up with a result that was completely different from the initial design, and we needed to remake a large part of it. In the second example, the increase in vacations wasn't motivated by the intense work but because he was unhappy. One day, the man came to me and told me he was leaving the company. I should have reacted sooner so we could have talked and tried to help him. Since then, I have decided not to let anything pass, and to react immediately. That's why I needed to explain the difference between not understanding and not realising something. .

Another thing. Don't change what you have decided immediately in reaction to an event... but if

that he made the decision, and listened to the opinions of people around him. He demonstrated that he cared what his team had to say. The bad thing is that he changed the rule too easily. In reality, you can't expect to make a rule pleasing everyone. There is always a problem, for example "let's increase everyone's salary." But come on, if a majority accepts it, there is always a minority opposed, but you can't then change a rule every time you hear someone complaining about it.

The job of a team leader is to provide maintenance in realtime, to limit friction. If you feel something is impossible or problematic then you need to react. Even if you need to let some time pass before you do anything, you can't let something bad last too long; you need to address it. If you don't react fast enough, it could have a detrimental effect on the team's motivation and slow things down. So, first analyse, then make a decision,





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Management: Nagoshi-san gets tough

At the workplace, I always think about limiting this kind of accident but sometimes you just can't prevent it. The real problem is the reason why. If there is a member of staff who has not noticed the stone, I can't criticise him for that. There is not much you can do about it. Of course, you might warn him to pay more attention in the future, but there is no sense in getting angry. However, if the reason is that he has paid no attention to the environment at all, well, this is another story. If this happened, he would be told off by me. Why? Because people who use the reason of not having noticed the stone to explain their accident are often the people who did notice it but, because of a lack of courage or will, just accepted that they would fall. It was too demanding to avoid it. I think this is a big issue. They don't give much importance to their work. I can't stand this.

However, I can't say I don't understand them at all. When you are in a very busy environment, you need an incredible amount of power to deal with your work and that of everyone else at the same time. If you are irresponsible, you could give any reason for failing, but this would show a lack of respect for the other people. This could even be the start of a fight at work. I've had that experience myself in the past. Once, I felt that what someone was doing was in fact different from what was decided initially, but, because I felt that making any remarks would lead to trouble, I let him carry on.

you are sure you are wrong don't hesitate for one second. I know this sounds strange – I mean, these are two opposite things – so I'd like to explain this clearly. First, there is a way for everything. Time goes by and work goes on. You don't know if the work is going smoothly or not, and you need time to evaluate it. To analyse the work, you need data, but if there is none, you simply continue to work.

However, if you have reason to believe things are going wrong, you would think that the next step is to address these issues. Writing this, it seems very simple but in reality, as always, it's much more complex. For example, when a problem happens, you make a decision to solve it. Because it is not easy to get used to this new decision, others will counter with their own suggestions. To ease problems, you need to accommodate those suggestions. Then those suggestions get suggestions from others, and you make more changes, and so on... in the end, you would have to drop the changes entirely.

A waste of time, and you are right back at the start again. So what was wrong in this process? Analysing it, the person who made the rule did one good thing and one bad thing. The good thing is that

hear the reaction and stay cool. This is a formula, and it applies well to the game creation process.

There's something I would like to say. What to do with people who don't realise anything? First, as I said previously, I think many of these people really do realise, but don't want to react. But there also people who genuinely don't realise anything. In that case, you need to spend time improving that. You check every one of his tasks, and you spend twice the energy you would spend on others. The person may think this is useless or restrictive, but the point is to not lose more time at the end. In time, this will develop into a form of trust so you don't need so many checks, and everyone saves time.

"First analyse, then make a decision, hear the reaction and stay cool. This is a formula, and it applies well to the game creation process"

My database is filled with so many of these issues. I store my successes but also my failures so I can avoid making the same mistake in the future. This is important to guide me. Sometimes, I feel like I'm thinking too much. But to make a great creation, you need a good atmosphere, a good dynamism in your environment. I think this kind of philosophy is important. Time to go back to work. See you again.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Now, I don't want you to think I have a one track mind, but, well… on May 16, 2002, the *Final Fantasy XI* online service began for real in Japan. It's a little embarrassing, but this is still the only videogame I have in my head. I can't shake it. My passion won't cool; it remains intact, and I am addicted. I sit alone. I play silently. It is my everyday life. For months I've been wondering why I can't break away, and then all of a sudden, it came to me.

As you know, *Final Fantasy XI* is an online RPG. Well, you should know by now, not just because I can't stop myself from talking about it, but because the MMRPG as a genre is very developed overseas, with a large number of people going online to participate. The start is simple: you access PlayOnline, register a few details, and then complete the process to create your character. Then it gets interesting, because you can enter the swords-and-sorcery world of Vana'diel to become one of its inhabitants, just one adventurer in a world of heroes.

Quickly, you meet other adventurers – real players, just like you – and join force to defeat harder enemies. As you solve mysteries and fulfil quests your adventure get bigger. In other words, *Final Fantasy XI* is a very orthodox or basic RPG, but with a simple, single twist, just like Sega's *Phantasy Star Online*. If you extract the gaming part from either game, you would have an endless repetition of tasks. It is so orthodox that they would be rapidly boring. But in my case, I enjoy playing *Final Fantasy XI* everyday. Even without the game part of it, I still log on to Vana'diel. I am still addicted. Why is that?

It's the simple twist, of course. On the other side of the monitor, there is someone. Yes, after many months of meandering columns, I've reached the conclusion that some of you perhaps already suspected: the killer feature of online videogames is the human contact. It might seem obvious, but it's worth looking at in detail. When I can't defeat a given enemy, I'm forced to make contact, to form a party including several other adventurers. If I don't have the necessary information or items, I can get them through contact: this time by exchanging things with other people or by using the game's currency, Guil, to go shopping.

And there's more. If you meet other adventurers with the very same skill, hobby or playing style, you can form a ring shell, a group, a guild, a clan. This is a more social aspect, and Vana'diel, is shaped thanks to that, the communication between people. People chat online using messages. Does that remind you something? Anything? Come on, you can do it. Yes, that's right: talking in the game is very much like the real world. However, and this is something important to me, here you can get over the limits of your everyday life. Remember that? I barely do. There are no barriers any more, no discrimination. That said, there is still a social hierarchy: if you encounter a very skilled and charismatic person, he or she may become the leader of the group and start giving orders. Others, loners, may prefer to go at their own pace, wandering peacefully across the land. Here the absence of companionships defines who they are – they have made a choice to go alone, even when there are other people to play with, and that's something that would not be possible without those people there in the first place. Above any feature of the game, the most important thing is there is someone else on the other side of the screen, even when they're not actually involved. The most important thing is the feeling that there are others.

So, in addition to your real life, from this moment on, you have another one. It is a fresh start, and it is taking place everyday in the artificial world of Vana'diel. Little has been set in stone by the developers or the producer of the game. The users are the heroes of the game, and they make it happen, make it alive. Of course, there is some structure – in order for the game to run smoothly, monsters and NPCs have to exist somewhere. But this has been done in order to give *Final Fantasy XI* a gaming image. It's nothing to do with making it more interesting directly, it just causes it to be so: it's designed to push adventurers forward so they spread all over the world. That's why I've been travelling across Vana'diel for six months now and that's why I'm still travelling, and that's why I can't stop writing about it.

I really love the people, too, those who live in this world. I even still communicate with the people I met at my very first party at the start of my involvement in *Final Fantasy XI*. At least when they return my messages, that is. My experience and skills get higher; I chain-link battles, and I have become a veteran. And, as I come through battles with people, the friendship gets deeper, stronger… and all that without me knowing anything about them, without seeing the true face behind the artificial character onscreen. You know what? I don't care. I don't even think about it – we don't need real life, since we are happy in this fake one.

All that said, there are some people I would never like to be with in a party, just like in real life. I love Vana'diel, but you don't have only good experiences there, and some evenings I'm left with nothing other than bitterness. In turn, that just makes the thrill greater, the positive experiences into even happier times. What kind of adventurer am I going to meet today in *Final Fantasy XI*? What are those great guys I met yesterday doing right now? Oh, I remember, there was that one friend who made me a promise that he would sell me "one hell of a sword." You make appointments. You forget some. In this parallel world, experience and events accumulate and overwhelm you rapidly.

And that's the greatest thing, because *Final Fantasy XI* thrives on relationships, and your relationships live or die according to your own actions, just like real life. It is a second canvas, where you can learn from mistakes you made on the first. That's why I can't break away from the game, because the relationships in it are important to me. It's a happy conclusion, though perhaps it arises from real world melancholy. That's my Tokyo Game Life, or, maybe it's my July Kingdom of Sandoria Game Life. Increasingly, it's becoming difficult to tell.





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Contact: Kojima-san's had a close encounter playing *FFXI*

"Talking in the game is very much like the real world. However, and this is important to me, here you can get over the limits of your life"

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

BC
Lionhead has always talked a good game, and it's the hypothesised freeform nature of *BC*'s world that has **Edge** excited. Evolution remains a way off, though.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Burnout 2: Point of Impact
Finished just minutes before this was written, *B2* is now a definite review for next issue. Assuming a surviving member of the dev team sends it our way.



(PlayStation2) Acclaim

Metroid Prime
A recent chance to play this at a Nintendo party revealed a superb translation of the 2D experience. Forget the critics: this is likely to be very special.



(GameCube) Nintendo

TimeSplitters2
A recent chance to play this at an Eidos party revealed a superb update of the original. No MapMaker code meant the review had to be delayed.



(PS2, GC, Xbox) Eidos

If they build it will we come?

Edge plays online devil's advocate

So while Sony and Nintendo appear to be hedging their bets, at least in Europe, Microsoft has staked its claim with regard to online gaming by announcing the inaugural Xbox Live line-up. But at the risk of courting controversy: so what? Sure, efforts are being taken to ensure that online gaming will be just as thrilling as competing from the same sofa, but exactly how important is vanquishing strangers to that elusive beast, the mainstream gamer? Or even for those of us who've already sampled *Halo* online?

Well to console manufacturers, publishers (particularly those of any one of the multitude of MMRPGs currently in development), telecom companies, ISPs, and indeed the investment community, all eagerly awaiting the pay-off generated by the currently untapped desire to play online, it is, of course, crucially important. In a recent interview, Shigeru Miyamoto suggested that multiplayer games were easy to develop – there's none of that pesky AI coding, or lengthy fine-tuning for example. So for developers too, the advent of widespread online gaming could be an end to the trials and tribulations of creating a compelling singleplayer experience to rival the likes of *Halo* and *Super Mario Sunshine*.

But one only has to look as far as WAP as an example of a service built for an anticipated upsurge in interest that never manifested – crippling the current roll-out of 3G services in the process. Who's to say that those people who are currently happy with *Hearts* on their PC are going to convert to *Halo 2* on their Xboxes? And is any seasoned *EverQuest* player realistically going to find the time to play any other game on any other platform? Is the audience for online console gaming actually there?

It may not seem like an important question to ask – after all, even the transition to widespread broadband gaming is unlikely to spell the end for singleplayer gaming. But it is another example of the way in which the videogame industry continues to overestimate both the gullibility of its customers and the demand for its products. The leap to network connection may yet prove as significant as the leap from 2D to 3D. But it could equally prove to be an expensive folly that pushes the industry towards its next transition period. So it's imperative that Microsoft makes its first foray count. Just as well it's leading its charge with the likes of *Halo 2* then.













Racing Evoluzione

Predictably, extended play of pre-release code reveals another excellent adrenaline-filled ride





The track designs in *Racing Evoluzione* are particularly awe-inspiring. There's a real sense of depth and solidity and elevation is worked in well



The year is 1976 and *Night Driver* is launched by Atari. One 'car', one 'track', limited fun. Ever since, developers have been thinking up new ways to entertain car racing enthusiasts. Turbo boosts, chassis-mounted weapons, pit stops, even running pedestrians over. And now? You have to sympathise with developers, it seems you either go for the easy immediacy of *Burnout* or the intricate garage tuning options of *Gran Turismo*. It's a thorny problem, and one that Milestone has clearly thought long and hard about for *Racing Evoluzione*.

The twist here is that you don't just collect cars; you actually build a brand. From choosing the logo to inspecting your very first dismal and cluttered garage, the player must take his company and make it world renowned with a showroom full of power vehicles as proof. As you win races, and move up the corporate ladder, your surroundings will change accordingly. Eventually you'll even have a plush office and a flirtatious secretary.

Rather than collecting and tuning cars, the emphasis is very much on the evolution of your brand and the company's identity.

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Milestone**
Origin: **Italy**
Release: **February 2003**

Previously in **E**112





Although the game is more about building a brand (evolving your vehicle is merely a case of clicking on the design scheme you prefer), there will be a few tuning options in the garage. The handling is sturdy and responsive, though rival cars tend to bunch up

Older cars are not merely sold off to provide more capital for faster vehicles. Instead the blueprints are put back onto the drawing board and transformed into something slicker and speedier by your R&D department. There are four main stages of evolution: roadster, sports, supercar and dream car. Along with original car designs there will be a number of manufacturer's cars in the game including, Lotus, Ford, Dodge, MG and Mitsubishi. And, thankfully, deformation and damage will be fully implemented.

The build **Edge** has experienced is very convincing indeed. Handling is not quite as sophisticated as in *Gran Turismo*, but it delivers an immediacy and sensitivity still sadly missing from most driving games these days. However, there are two major niggles that could spoil the final game.

"Handling isn't quite as sophisticated as in GT, but it delivers an immediacy and sensitivity still sadly missing from most driving games these days"

First, rival cars tend to bunch up and there's little sense that a realistic competition is in progress. And second, racing purists will blanch at the 'boost' function which sees rival cars slowing down whenever you make a mistake to ensure you can still catch up. In a three-lap race this necessarily means that only the last lap has any significance.

However, the game is still undergoing balancing and the learning curve will hopefully reach the standards set by the gorgeous track design and visuals evident throughout the title.



Designers' republic

Milestone was so keen to develop stylish yet far-out vehicle designs for *Racing Evoluzione* that it even launched a comprehensive competition targeting Italy's (and a few other EU nations') most respected design colleges. The non-manufacturer vehicles in the game are certainly flamboyant and it is likely to be very rewarding to see how some of the fictional road vehicles evolve into dream cars. Fortunately, damage will be recorded on all vehicles.

Robotech: Battlecry

Format: **PS2, Xbox, G**
Publisher: **TDK Mediactiv**
Developer: **Vicious Cyc**
Origin: **U**
Release: **November (PS2, Xbox), December (G**

Preview code of Harmony Gold's massively popular '80s cartoon series arrives in **Edge**'s office. It may fail to reveal any surprises but it doesn't uncover any potentially disastrous elements, either



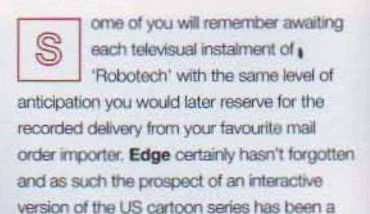
For the city environments, guard mode (above) is preferable to zooming around in plane form which includes a (decidedly tempting) boost function











Some of you will remember awaiting each televisual instalment of 'Robotech' with the same level of anticipation you would later reserve for the recorded delivery from your favourite mail order importer. **Edge** certainly hasn't forgotten and as such the prospect of an interactive version of the US cartoon series has been a very long time coming.

Played over 15 levels, the game begins with a considerable cut-scene detailing the plot: the devastating global war which looks set to ensure the extinction of the human race; the crash landing of the SDF-1, a gigantic alien vessel whose discovery unites the world's nations; and the inevitable subsequent confrontation with its owners, the Zentraedi warrior race.

The type of mission includes sky, city and outerspace battles and all offer primary and secondary, non-linear goals. Regardless of the type of sortie you can alternate between your mech's modes using the d-pad – plane and robot modes are self explanatory while the 'guard' option is somewhere between the two and, among other things, allows you to pick up and carry items.

The battles **Edge** got involved in recreated the series' chaotic (though stylish) sequences with aplomb. Indeed, every element of the game appears faithful to its inspiration – even down to individual missile types and every sound effect (sampled from the original soundtrack).

Edge should get the chance to kick more Zentraedi butt (in its final form) in time for a review next issue.

It's on PlayStation, too

While most of the preview period took place using Xbox code, **Edge** also got to try the PlayStation2 version (two shots above). Although noticeable, the slight drop in resolution does little to rob the game of its visual charm and the aesthetic remains faithful to the anime series. Less impressive was the twoplayer deathmatch mode which, without the possibility of adding bots, felt somewhat empty and too limited an experience. The confined arenas didn't help matters, either.



Your main weapon is a machine gun (there's a sniper mode useful in urban environments) while missiles make up the secondary armament. The triggers offer evasive manoeuvres



Haegemonia: Legions of Iron

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Wanadoo**
Developer: **Digital Reality**
Origin: **Hungary**
Release: **November**

A surprise contender in the space strategy field aims to achieve hegemony over its higher-profile rivals

Any prejudice about the standard of development in eastern Europe should have been quashed by now. Illusion Softworks of the Czech Republic (*Hidden & Dangerous*, *Mafia*) has now been joined at the forefront of games development by Digital Reality of Hungary (*Imperium Galactica II*). The standard of technology at this Budapest-based developer– *IGII* won a BAFTA for its music, while *Haegemonia*'s visuals are to die for – is matched by its scrupulous attention to detail and clear approach to design. Not to mention the kind of work ethic that has seen *Haegemonia* near completion in just 15 months.

Strongly inspired by *Homeworld* and the *Imperium Galactica* titles, *Haegemonia* offers a realtime strategy dynamic that centres on spectacular combat in fully 3D solar systems. Conscious that some titles of this type offer too much too early, Digital Reality has crafted two campaigns which gradually introduce the deeper elements over the course of some 30 missions each. So early on you are able to get the hang of directing small groups of fighters through space, only later having to deal with the subtleties of using the third dimension. Later still, you take control of planets' resources, research, spies, heroes and construction. Even at its most expansive, though, with scores of ships under your command, there's a minimum of micro-management to get bogged down in, and ships will look after themselves competently.

Digital Reality's approach to design cuts through the obsession with realism which some developers hold all too dear. So while the whole solar system is shown in a given map (others, including our own, become accessible once jumpgate technology is researched), the planets are scaled down. This allows them to have tactical significance without dominating the setting: your ships are represented on a large scale for easy visual assessment. Equally, each ship displays its remaining integrity with circling polygons: not realistic, but enabling quick tactical decisions.

Having faced numerous recent difficulties with publishers – *Haegemonia* was signed with the sadly departed and rather unhelpful Cryo, while rights to build on the *Imperium Galactica* franchise were also recently lost – it's encouraging to see a developer bringing ambitious, technically astute titles to market promptly. And while *Haegemonia* probably won't storm the sales charts, that's unlikely to knock a developer which clearly knows which way the galactic wind is blowing.













Space stations are crucial tactical pieces – sometimes controlling an area with a static force is a mission-critical objective (top). Of course, blowing stuff up is always fun. And *Haegemonia* certainly doesn't forget that games should be about fun, after all (above)



While the screenshots here scarcely do the game justice when it's in motion, it's still possible to get some idea of just how lavish the visuals are. Each effect in *Haegemonia* is custom-designed by hand

It's full of stars

Things have come a long way since *Elite*. *Haegemonia*'s graphical splendour represents the cutting edge of what the PC is capable, with visual effects to match anything in development today. Yet all this doesn't come at the cost of requiring Herculean system specs: it'll run happily on a PIII 700 with a basic GeForce card. Pleasingly, the engine automatically scales to what you have available, throwing more effects onto the screen if your PC can handle it. This impressive engine also powers Digital Reality's appropriately named Vietnam tactics title *Platoon*, though it's heavily modified there.

Neocron

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **CDV**
Developer: **Reakktor.com**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **Out now (beta)**

It's a MMRPG. It's an FPS. And it has elements of 'D&D'. Not unlike Deus Ex, then. Only far more sociable

It is not, thematically at least, going to surprise anyone. *Neocron* equals cyberpunk, thus you could write the dark future setting from the back of any issue of '2000AD' or a formula Gibson rip-off novel; huge technobroken cities, radioactive wastelands, trenchcoats and hovercars. That, of course, is mostly irrelevant, since *Neocron* is a MMRPG, and the truly interesting stories are supposed to arise from within its community.

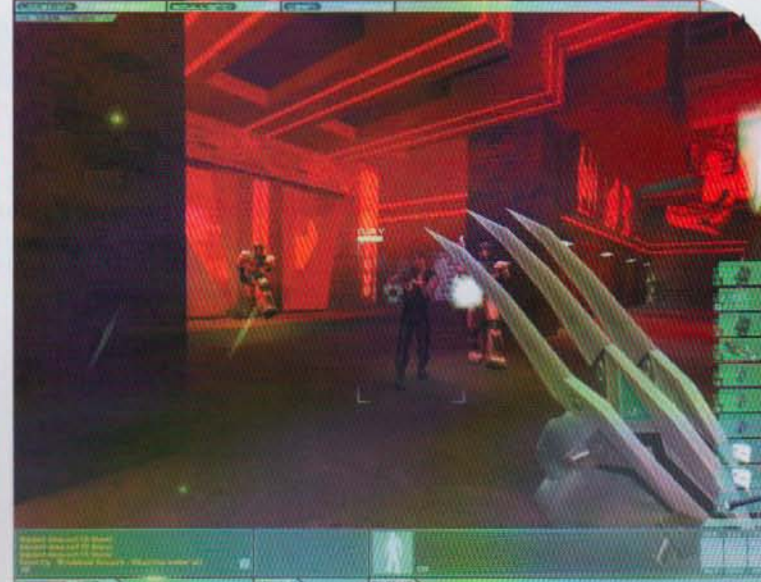
In fact, calling it a MMRPG conceals a good deal of *Neocron*'s uniqueness, since it's also heavily focused on that other favourite acronym, the FPS. Combat is firstperson and realtime, and while the amount of damage you inflict is based upon all manner of unwieldy statistics, actually inflicting it depends on your ability to hit the target, which depends broadly on typical mouse/keyboard FPS skills. Fights can involve dozens of players and countless monsters at once, and while there will clearly be some size limit to workable fights, the developer is reluctant to give a number. Perhaps that's because it's difficult to tell; still the netcode is efficient and, in theory at least, the scale of a battle is limited only by the number of people in an area.

But combat isn't everything. Players must specify a style of play at the start which affects their character's development path. It's all pretty self-explanatory stuff – 'tanks' are strong and good with weapons, while the spy character model is weaker but good at hacking. Each of the broad 'D&D'-style stat categories is split into further abilities, which must be upgraded with experience points. Shades of *Deus Ex*, perhaps, and the blend of MMRPG and FPS at times looks as intriguing as Ion Storm's; perhaps not as intelligent, but certainly more sociable.

Obviously the newborn world is fragile – **Edge**'s first-day demonstration had both connection and stability problems, and the majority of the tour had to take place in an unpopulated world – but most PC gamers will expect and live with that, particularly on something as hard to playtest as this. Hence *Neocron*'s current open beta (and coverdisk presence), which should provide most people with a risk-free opportunity to sample a world that's clearly a product of passionate development. The key to success will be in hooking a userbase with the same amount of passion; without people, *Neocron*'s stories will not live up to the grandeur of the setting.









Neocron's seedier aspect is shown off in its red-light district, with the seedy thrills of peep shows and player vs player killing on offer to intrepid tourists





As with most MMRPGs, there are two sides to *Neocron* – the game, and the social aspect – but *Neocron*'s firstperson action may well prove more of a draw to gamers demotivated by typically stat-heavy combat

Unlimited Saga

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Square
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: December

A novel fruit machine-style combat system and an eccentric graphical style suggest that Square is still going out on a limb to entertain gamers

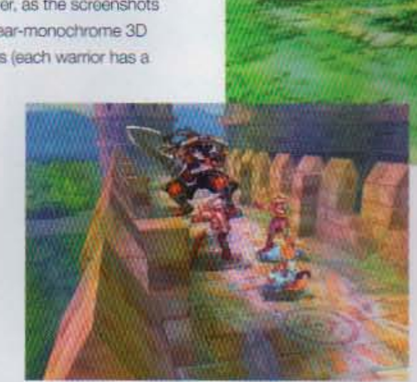


Sound junkies will be pleased to note the game's support for Dolby Pro Logic II music and effects

Square has had mixed fortunes over the last two years. Its ill-advised foray into film-making is no doubt still causing the company accountants a few headaches, while success for the *Final Fantasy XI* online experiment is far from certain. So it's interesting to see that *Unlimited Saga*, the latest edition in an RPG series that started out on the Game Boy in 1989, is not a safe by-the-numbers roll out, but a rather experimental oddity.

The plot is standard stuff. Henry and his mother Laura are on a quest through a standard mythical realm, searching for seven artifacts which have the power to bring about a new golden age. However, as the screenshots show, the visual style is stunningly offbeat. Mixing near-monochrome 3D backgrounds with intricately animated 2D characters (each warrior has a different set of animations depending on what weapon they're carrying) and lush drawings of key scenic locations, the designers are going for the look of a lavishly illustrated storybook.

The combat system is similarly innovative. No matter how many combatants are in your party (you pick up allies as you go), you only get five moves per turn. When these are picked, a fruit machine-style reel spins to decide the strength and accuracy. Each has a hit gauge (effectively armour points) and a life gauge (health) – a slight shift away from the ordinary.





Producer Akitoshi Kawazu is a *Saga* veteran joined here by several notable *Final Fantasy* luminaries. Any game that takes the road less travelled away from 'realistic visuals' is welcome

Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Shaba Games, Small Rockets (GBA)
Origin: US
Release: March 2003

After skateboarding, snowboarding, surfing, BMX and MotoX, it's the turn of wakeboarding as Activision's O2 extreme sports range continues to expand its horizons

Wakeboarding may not be the first sport you'd consider as a potential candidate for videogame treatment but **Edge** first played *Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder* early this year and was surprised at how well the concept appeared to work. A few months on and things have improved further.

As with the other O2 titles, Shaun Murray is joined by a selection of world class competitors who spend their lives trying to get him off the top spot. The game features a variety of real locations from the Pro Wakeboard Tour as well as a comprehensive repertoire of tricks.

It's currently a compelling ride, with the trick system familiar to anyone who's previously played any of the O2 range. One interesting aspect is the ability to let go of the tow cable, go off to grind the top of a boat, for instance, drop back on to the water and grab the leash back (assuming you're reasonably close to the boat, of course). It's a clever way of ensuring the experience doesn't feel overly restrictive by allowing you a little more freedom of movement. A further attractive prospect is the offer of simultaneous twoplayer action, with one of you controlling the boat. It's not as rewarding as being the wakeboarder, true, but it's a welcome addition nonetheless.

Early code is promising and **Edge** will continue to keep an close eye on this one.



The experience isn't as restrictive as you might initially fear – letting go of the leash to go off and do your thing for a bit feels particularly rewarding





Edge obviously requires further playtime to draw definitive conclusions but early signs are good

Vietcong

Format: PC
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: Pterodon
Origin: Czech Republic
Release: 2003

Recreate those dramatic Vietnam film moments in what is shaping up to be a quality FPS. Barber's 'Adagio for Strings' optional



The jungle warfare is very tense indeed, with sounds and bullets echoing around environments with alarming authenticity. Survival depends on teamwork, although berserk rampages can also pay off for the very skilful, or the very lucky

Colonel Kurtz, Captain Willard, Private Joker, Sergeant Barnes, Sergeant Elias, John Rambo. It took some time, but film-makers eventually felt able to sensitively portray the Vietnam war, before turning it into a backdrop for propagandist action movies. Yet software publishers still find it a touchy subject. There have been one or two, of course, but it takes a thick-skinned company such as Take 2 to really do the war justice, and probably generate a few headlines in the process.

Pterodon has clearly been watching such films assiduously and, more to the point, current code is robust and captures the tension of jungle warfare well. Unsurprisingly, cover is provided by a variety of vegetation. A living, breathing forest has been depicted well and the detail is breathtaking. Levels are open yet still retain a crushing sense of claustrophobia. Whispered voices and jungle echoes keep the player very much on edge and when a bullet shot does ring out the initial reaction is to dive straight to the ground.

Like *Operation Flashpoint* little damage can be taken before expiry and teamwork is crucial for progress. Health can be restored, for instance, if your medic is still alive to tend to the wounds. With over 20 missions, including hill assaults and river boat attacks, *Vietcong* could be very absorbing. **Edge** just hopes the possible addition of quicksaves does not spoil the good design evident elsewhere.





Music from the period adds extra atmosphere, and guess what? Pterodon is even throwing in a sniper weapon to distinguish it from other titles

Delta Force – Black Hawk Down

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Publisher: NovaLogic
Developer: In-house
Origin: US
Release: Q4 (PC), 2003 (PS2, Xbox)

The Delta Force series looks set to benefit from a historically authentic military campaign and upgraded Comanche engine







The environments featured in *Black Hawk Down* are impressively large – allowing for some atmospheric set-piece sequences from the back of a number of vehicles, such as the initial helicopter ride to your first destination

The latest instalment in the *Delta Force* series is not, as you might anticipate, based on Ridley Scott's film, but actually based on the book, the film and the historical background to the events depicted in the book and the film. It's even being developed with the assistance of two real-life Delta Force veterans – one of whom actually saw service during the Black Hawk Down campaign (and indeed also advised the makers of the film). Such verisimilitude throws up its own problems of course – keeping a blend of weaponry that is both authentic and retains fan favourites from previous *Delta Force* titles, for example.

Another problem is getting the enemy AI to reflect the disorganised tactics of the Somali warlord forces – which is the bit of the game that still requires some work. Otherwise, it's looking very promising, with an enhanced version of the same engine used in the developer's *Comanche* titles enabling some positively huge (and appropriately authentic) environments. The opening sequence, seen from the vantage point of one of a flotilla of helicopter gunships is particularly atmospheric, and work is currently being undertaken to ensure that streets are suitably rubble-strewn. It's also been announced that the PC and Xbox versions will each benefit from online multiplayer modes – though as yet there's no word regarding the PlayStation2 version.

Ghost Master

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Sick Puppies
Origin: UK
Release: Q4 (PC), 2003 (Xbox, PS2)

Previously in E110

Teach ghosts to pong out a room, run rampant through corridors and put the microwave on the blink. Ghost Master is clearly for the mischievous





The mortals use an incomprehensible babble in their communications, but the wavy lines above the heads indicate how scared they actually are

It's one of those ideas that you can't believe hasn't been tried before. **Edge**'s first preview of *Ghost Master* (**E**110) revealed much about the tone and humour of the game but there were worries about the level of flexibility within the system.

The good news is that Sick Puppies is ensuring that depth is layered into the game by giving the player many objectives, each with multiple solutions. Indeed, mortals must be subtly manipulated and scaring them witless will only lead to failure. In an early scenario, based on 'The Evil Dead' movie, an ancient tome is locked in a basement and must be discovered by the spooked humans. A key is hidden but you can draw a mortal near to it using a Fascinate spell or even move it around telekinetically. Alternatively, an Apparition can draw a braver member of the posse to an axe that is hidden outside in the woods. If the mortal's nerve still holds out the door to the basement can then be hacked down.

Solutions largely depend on which ghosts you select from the 'bench' for each level, and it's unlikely that any two players will finish the game having used the same techniques. The formula is open to great customisation and you can depend on expansion packs if the game takes off. Expect *Ghost Master* to quietly creep into popular consciousness come its release day.



Many of the missions involve freeing ghosts who can then join your posse. Completing tasks allows them to gain new abilities, so it's in your interests to form your favourite dream team

Super Monkey Ball Jr.

Format: GBA
Publisher: THQ/Sega
Developer: Realism Studios
Origin: UK
Release: 2003

It's Super Monkey Ball, but on the GBA. And not in some sort of bastardised top-down form; in glorious Mode 7-style 3D

The handheld conversion of Amusement Vision's monkey masterpiece was slightly sidelined at E3, largely by the prospect of real-life (well, polygonal at least) Monkey Tennis on more advanced hardware. The technical promise shown by the UK-developed port was, though, duly noted by members of the journalistic fraternity, shortly before someone handing out free T-shirts captured the collective attention. But having had the latest version thrust into our hands in a murky Manchester nightclub, **Edge** can attest that it's a breathtaking translation, featuring almost every element of its GameCube prototype.

Mode 7-style graphics are sublime throughout, and the degree of control is as nuanced as that of the GameCube prototype as it's reasonable to expect on Nintendo's handheld; a semblance of analogue control is imposed upon the digital pad of the GBA by pressing button A or B, which either increases or decreases the speed with which levels are tilted. And on top of 60 main levels, spread out over beginner, advanced and expert sections, several minigames (Monkey Fight, Monkey Bowling and Monkey Golf) are included – and can be played either using a link cable or passing a single GBA around. *Super Monkey Ball Jr.* is not just technically impressive; it's genuinely fun to play. When it's released, those proverbial train journeys simply won't be the same again.



Developed in the UK, *Super Monkey Ball Jr.* is a testament to some serious coding skill. Every single element and characteristic that went into making the original one of the best games to be found on the GameCube is present and intact





Many levels are familiar enough, though it's not just a port of the GameCube title. Thankfully, as in the original, there's even a credits minigame

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Colin McRae Rally 3

Format: Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-house





Plays exactly as you'd hoped and displays the kind of attention to detail you've come to expect from the Warwickshire team. All that's left is for Colin to win the real championship this year

Space Fishermen

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEI
Developer: In-house





Initially designed at GE when *PenPen Trilcelon* came out, team members have since joined SCEI. Travel to 18 planets and try landing one of the 150 'fish' using your rod (DualShock2)

World Rally Championship 02

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Evolution Studios





A rewritten engine allowing four times the amount of roadside detail, 800km of track, 124 stages, 14 countries, the implementation of streams and fjords and due out this November

F-Zero

Format: Arcade, GC
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Amusement Vision/In-house





The latest shots from the *F-Zero* next-gen update show more promise than the admittedly worrying video shown at E3. Not that **Edge** would ever doubt Nagoshi-san's team, of course

Wolverine's Revenge

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Genepool





It has issues (namely camera and unconvincing boss encounters) but there is promise: group attack combos, a decent arcade feel and a good sense of pace. It's voiced by Mark Hamill, too

Xi Go

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEI
Developer: In-house





If you've never played *Xi* (*Devil Dice*), one of the PlayStation's best puzzlers, here's your next-gen chance. The title (a play on words for 'saigo', meaning 'last') would suggest no further sequels

Dark Chronicle

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEI
Developer: In-house





Set 100 years after *Dark Cloud*, time-travelling duo Yuris and Monica face a new adventure. Incarnate monsters to obtain vital information, fish (and access minigames). Out in November

Mercedes-Benz World Racing

Format: Xbox, PC, GC
Publisher: TDK Mediactive
Developer: Synetic





Needs tweaking but interesting touches are promised. The licence allows the inclusion of (highly detailed) vintage, racing, prototypes and current models. November release (GC, TBC)





Mojibribon

There's always one. A creative who tears up the rule sheet and brings some much needed originality into the world. Meet Masaya Matsuura, designer of the industry's most vibrant games, and creator of possibly its weirdest to date

"It's been hell to develop." And **John Belamonte**, lead programmer on *Mojibribon*, is absolutely right. The game is doing something unusual, very unusual. But that's exactly what you'd expect from **Masaya Matsuura**, the designer of one of the most original and eccentric titles in recent memory in *Vib Ribbon*. And to get your head around his latest opus, it's probably best to take a gentle skip backwards first.

"What was fun with *Vib Ribbon* was the fact you could enjoy the game with any audio CD," Matsuura-san reflects. "Of course, use classical music and you would not get much fun, especially if you have long monotone sequences in the track. This gives you a very poor score. But even that was fun because you could try out all the CDs in your music collection and experience the variations. Anyway, I wanted to find a much wider concept. *Mojibribon* uses a speech synthesiser which is based on the use of text files. So, let's have fun with text files. That was my idea."

Belamonte, meanwhile, looks on. It seems that, while Matsuura-san dreams up the crazy ideas, Belamonte is tasked with making the technology bend to his will. Indeed, they had both toyed with the idea of developing this kind of voice synthesiser program for the PSone, even going so far as to write code and have it up and 'burbling', but they were never satisfied with the results. When SCEI announced PlayStation2, both men immediately wanted to realise the dream on this new, more powerful platform. On and off, *Mojibribon* has been a long time in development.

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **NanaOn-Sha**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter**



The visual effects, such as blotching ink and dripping colours, add an elegance to the action



Text play

But to the game. Belamonte is keen to explain the processes behind the strange and haunting images washing across the screen. "It is close to *Vib Ribbon* in that it's a very simple game to play, but this has a very different taste and very stylish visuals. *Mojibribon* does not work with an audio CD. This time the only form of input is text. Japanese text. And the program responds to the text in a 'rap' pattern. As you are playing, the game adds backgrounds and music as well. It's really something new."

In essence, then, *Mojibribon* is about the art of calligraphy. You choose one of three characters that must traverse coruscating ink clouds and paint delicate text for the synthesiser to process. Only the left analogue stick is required for this. When your character hits a certain mark you can begin to string text together and the more you push on





The text is written by making gentle pushes on the left analogue stick. Too heavy and the ink is thick, too light and it can fade away









The jiving music responds appropriately to your calligraphy and building up the rhythm allows you to string more sophisticated text strands together. Unfortunately, Matsuura-san is still scratching his head as to how the system can be translated for non-Japanese readers



the controller the 'fatter' the writing becomes. If you push gently the writing begins to fade. An ink meter at the left side of the screen indicates how much fluid you have left for each section, though jumping at key points will replenish your reservoir.

The game is structured like a spiral and divided into chapters. Each stage is even represented by the stones that the Japanese unearth from ancient rock formations to make their ink.

"Only when Japanese children go to a special school to learn calligraphy do they understand this beautiful aspect of their own culture. We wanted to capture this"



Writing text in rhythm to the music is important and the character evolves if text chains are strung together successfully. But a mere description does not do Matsuura-san's kaleidoscopic vision justice.

Calligraphy is a gentle and stylish artform grounded in a philosophy that has waned over recent years in Matsuura-san's country. "It has centuries of history, an interesting history that we wanted to merge with pop culture. When I looked in the foreign book stores in Japan, the calligraphy books were full of misunderstandings and false images. So I hit upon the idea of introducing these errors and mistakes. We had a lot of fun.

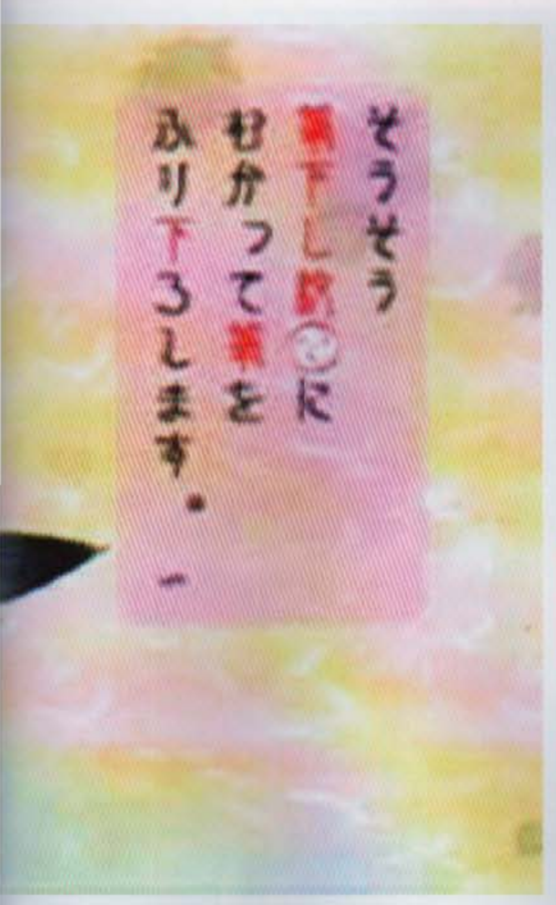
"You see, nowadays the Japanese have no sense at all when it comes to calligraphy. Only when children go to a special school to learn the art do they understand this beautiful aspect of their own culture. We wanted to capture this. We even had to build an engine for the game to handle our pop-style Japanese calligraphy."

The text is processed by what the team endearingly refers to as the "rap engine." Using similar voice synthesiser technology to *Vib Ribbon*, the NanaOn-Sha team then built another program alongside that could create the rap patterns. The difficulty was not getting the voice synthesiser to interpret certain text, it was getting it to interpret all text. And more: the team is now working on a custom mode that will allow players to edit their own stages in addition to the 18 already included in the game. Matsuura-san wants to deliver "nearly endless fun."

Which brings us neatly on to the online aspects of the game. In fact, it quickly emerges that the online option wasn't an afterthought for NanaOn-Sha but the driving principle behind the vision. "Our goal is to offer users a

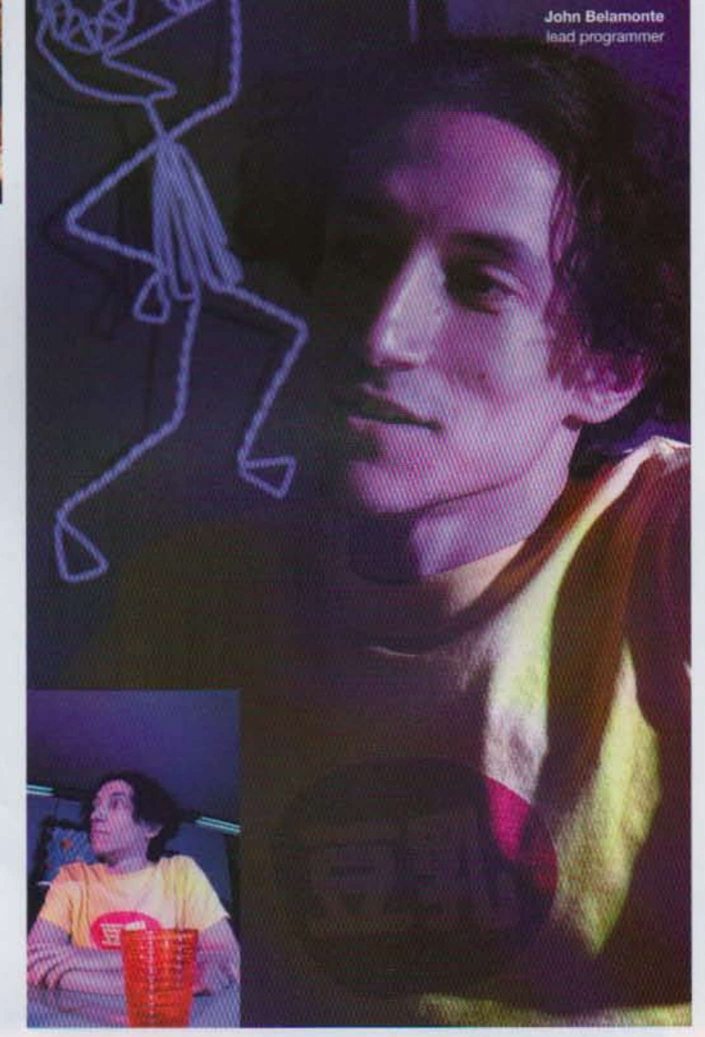


As the text 'wheel' rotates certain symbols appear. It is here that the player can jump, for instance, to add more ink to the ever drying pot




Masaya Matsuura
designer




John Belamonte
lead programmer

system so they can exchange emails," continues Matsuura-san excitedly. "Yes, the text file will actually become a stage and the person who gets this email will have to clear the stage before they can read it. This sounds ambitious but we are confident we can get it working. You see, an email is nothing more than a simple text file and our game is about making text heard. I mean, converting the written word into sound."

Colourful language

Matsuura-san is confident that the online game will take off even though the Japanese have hardly gone out in their droves to purchase the PS2 network adaptor and hard drive unit. He's a man keenly interested in evolving email communication which he finds fascinating, even "ridiculous." Why not subvert it, add colour and tone to the message as the text is being written? Getting a touching email is exciting, getting one that adds an element of skill and creativity makes it even more personal.

Mojibribon sounds charming, but in other ways it's a complete disaster. "I don't know if it can be translated into English," admits Matsuura-san forlornly. "I feel a real cultural wall." A sigh goes out from all non-Japanese speaking fans of his games. Imagine *PaRappa the Rapper* or *Um Jammer Lammy* but with some inscrutable barrier preventing you from comprehending its core delights. It seems Matsuura-san's ability to twist the universal language into universal entertainment has hit an insurmountable obstacle.

It would be a shame if only those familiar with Japanese calligraphy got a chance to explore this creative vision because *Mojibribon* may not turn out to be the most adrenaline-pumping videogame ever made, but it's sure to join the small ranks of those titles capable of poking at the elastic boundaries of the medium. Videogames are becoming a very broad church indeed, and among the unwashed flocks, *Mojibribon* could well be a saviour.



Halo 2

Even before Halo was released rumours of a sequel were zipping around the Internet, but for nearly a year Bungie has remained tight lipped. Until now. Prepare yourself for revelations on the most anticipated videogame of all time

Think more weapons, think more vehicles, think more environments, think more alien types, think better AI. Think in these terms and *Halo 2* will not let you down. But Bungie's take on the firstperson shooter was never about delivering more of the same. Still, there's the sense that some people just didn't get what *Halo* was about. Enjoyable, yes – but revolutionary? To understand why the changes going into *Halo 2* will comprehensively improve the experience it's important to underline what made *Halo* so special. And here's a clue for the Philistines that occasionally harangue **Edge**: it was never about including stupidly elaborate weapons.

"I think one of the reasons why *Halo* appealed to people is because it ignored a lot of the structure that has become entrenched in the genre," says **Jaime Griesemer**, lead designer on *Halo 2*. "I think people appreciated the purity of the experience – only having two weapons, regenerating health, grenades and then mêlée attacks that were always available."

It's almost a flippant remark and one easy to gloss over, but its the crux of what made *Halo*'s combat awe-inspiring. Weapons were supremely balanced, but more than that, they worked in conjunction with one another better than in any game before. In fact, it's difficult to think of another game that encourages you to constantly swap between ordnance to improve your chances of survival. Plasma Pistol and Needler Gun against Elites, Assault Rifle and Pistol against the Flood, Sniper Rifle and Rocket Launcher in the expansive



Although the recent video released on the Internet shows no true in-game footage, the tone and style of *Halo* has clearly been maintained. But will *Halo 2* be more of the same? Plans to overhaul the AI and introduce more interaction with the environments should provide an even deeper experience



- Format: **Xbox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Bungie Studios**
- Release: **US**
- Origin: **Winter 2003**

outdoor arenas. Depending on the context, weapon choice was crucial for success and the introduction of rechargeable shields, both your own and Covenant, made the two-weapon-only choice even more agonising.

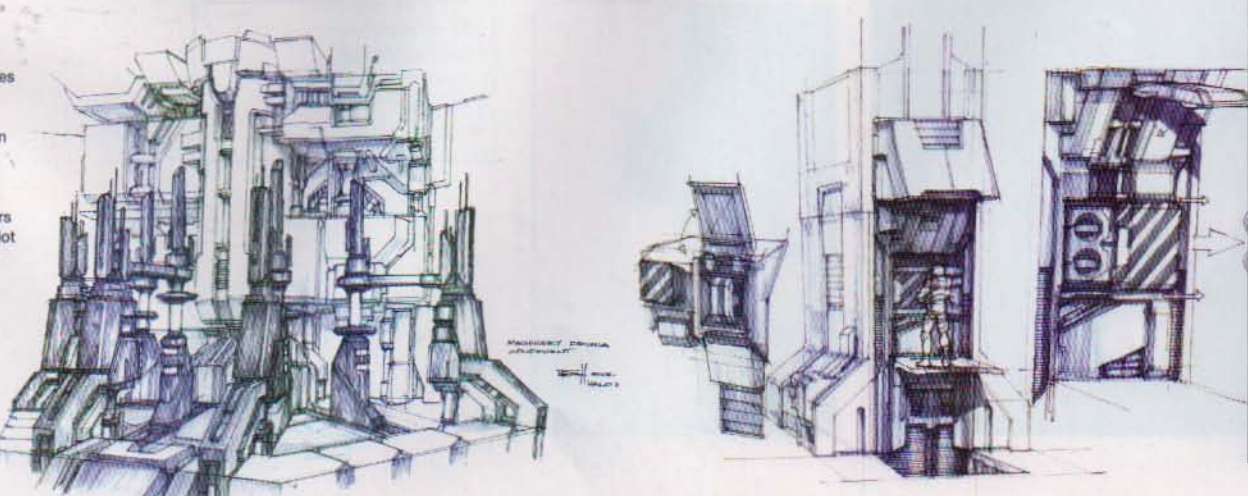
Imagine the difficulty, then, of introducing a new weapon or vehicle into such a finely honed system. To reiterate the point: Bungie cannot just add a more powerful superweapon to the mix like you'd see in any other FPS sequel. If they took the lazy route, the essence of what made *Halo* so consuming an experience would be lost. "The main objective with *Halo 2* is to preserve the balance that made *Halo* fun in the first place," confirms Griesemer. "We feel that we nailed the combat experience, and while we want to extend it, we don't want to destroy it by dumping in as many extras as possible." Yes, there will be more of everything, but the extras have not just been included to make impressive bullet points for the back of the box.

"It's going to be great when people get to play Halo 2 and then go back through Halo with new eyes and see all the hidden clues and connections they never noticed before"

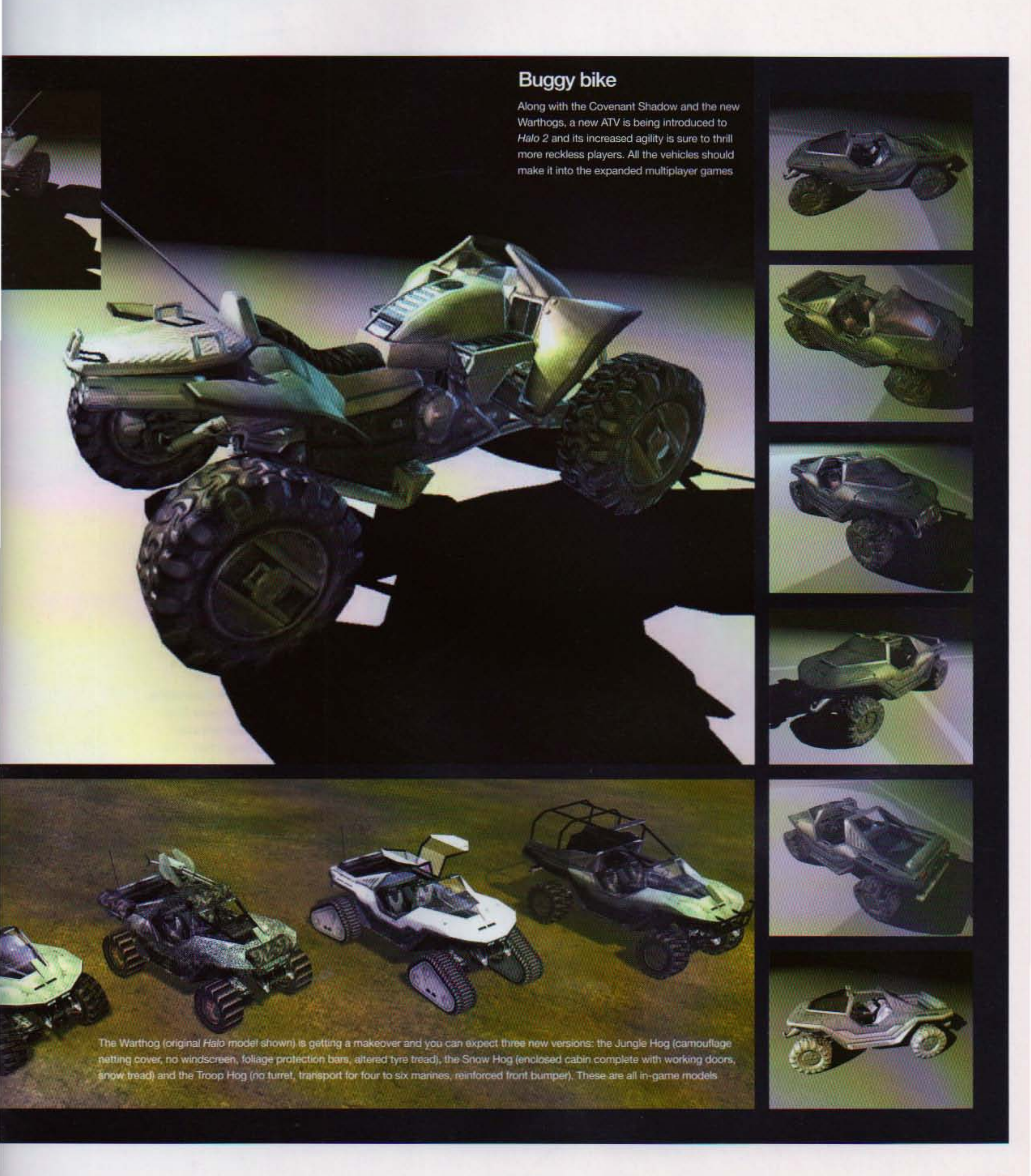
Working universe

Unquestionably, one of the aspects that made *Halo* such a monumental title was its sense of a working universe. If you thought *Halo* had an epic feel, then be prepared for something on a much larger scale altogether for its sequel.

"There were lots of things in *Halo* that were part of a much larger universe," continues Griesemer. "Nothing was random, everything from the patterns on the Elite armour to the names of the Covenant warships and the structure of *Halo* itself are part of a context that was not fully explained, but will be further explored in *Halo 2*. We were thinking about *Halo 2* throughout *Halo*'s development. It's going to be great when people get to play *Halo 2* and then go back through *Halo* with new eyes and see all the



The player eventually moves deep into Covenant home territory and Bungie is to communicate the transition with suitably eerie alien constructions. Replay incentives will also be introduced to entice players through the game again. Not that many will need them

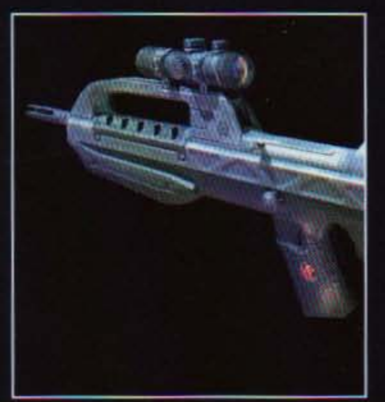


Buggy bike

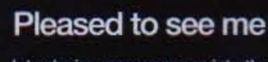
Along with the Covenant Shadow and the new Warthogs, a new ATV is being introduced to *Halo 2* and its increased agility is sure to thrill more reckless players. All the vehicles should make it into the expanded multiplayer games

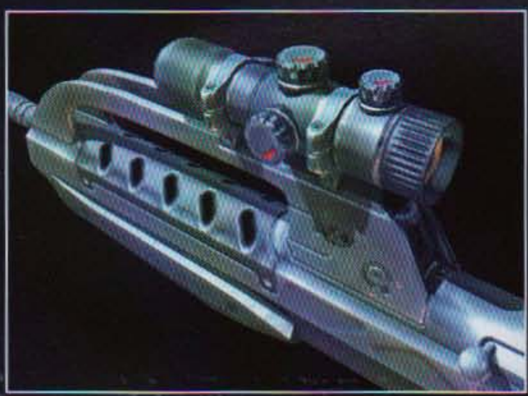
The Warthog (original *Halo* model shown) is getting a makeover and you can expect three new versions: the Jungle Hog (camouflage netting cover, no windscreen, foliage protection bars, altered tyre tread), the Snow Hog (enclosed cabin complete with working doors, snow tread) and the Troop Hog (no turret, transport for four to six marines, reinforced front bumper). These are all in-game models

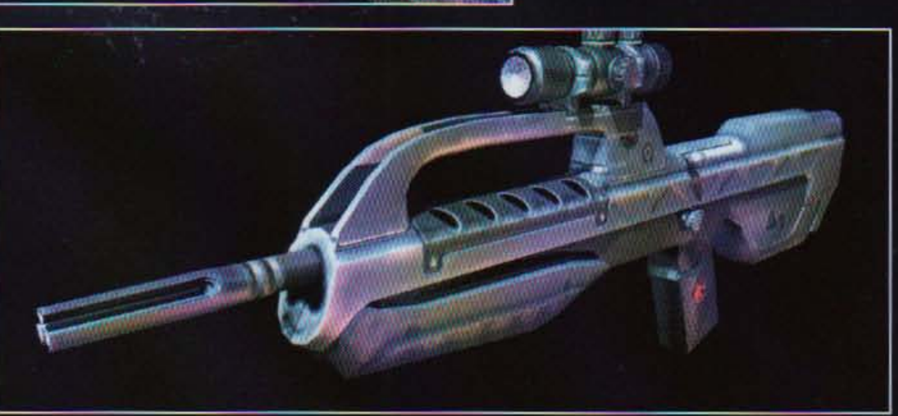








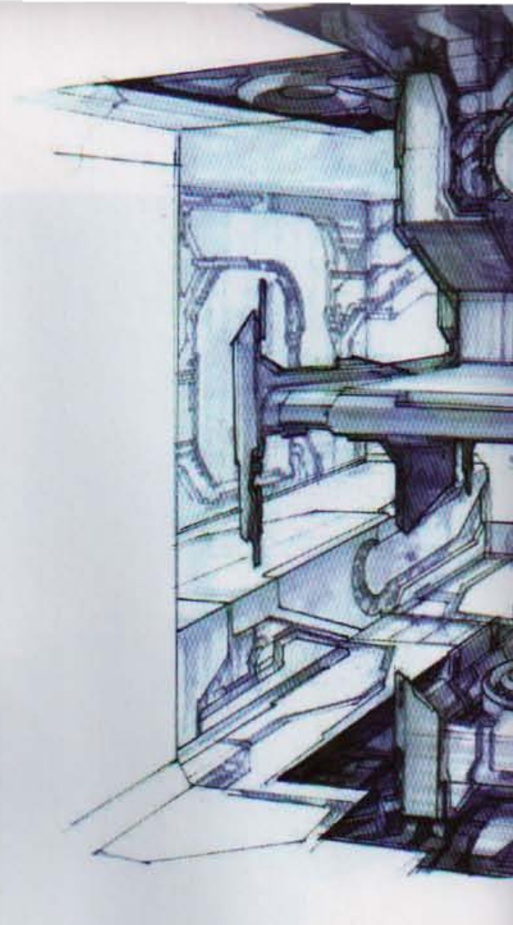




Pleased to see me

Introducing new weapons into the *Halo* universe is something that has given Bungie a few headaches. The balance of the original must be maintained but the team were keen to provide even more dramatic combat and a few surprises.

A new sniperscope gun (a combination between the sniper rifle and the assault rifle) makes the cut and there will be a powerful automatic weapon that can fire caseless ammo. Also, you can probably expect new Covenant ordnance, though what the Brutes are to use remains anyone's guess. (Again, all shots are in-game models.)



hidden clues and connections that they never noticed before."

Bungie is surprisingly open about the new storyline for *Halo 2*. It continues the story of Master Chief and Cortana, the powerful AI that resides inside his armour. After thwarting the Covenant and overseeing the destruction of Halo, Master Chief returns home. But it's an embattled home. At the beginning of *Halo 2* the Covenant have wiped out the last of the human colony worlds and are threatening Earth itself. Cortana and the Master Chief must defend humanity's last stronghold and then take the fight back to the Covenant, attacking the source of their power deep inside the Covenant world.

Culture clash

The further the player ventures into Covenant territory, the more he learns about its culture and motivations. "The Covenant is named for the pact binding its two primary races, the Elites and the Prophets," outlines Griesemer. "The Elites form the backbone of the Covenant military and the Prophets are the Covenant's political and spiritual leadership. Much of the game will focus on the relationship between these two races



Because it is viewed in-game so close to the screen, the scope of the Battle Rifle contains more polys than the Master Chief model. Getting the weapons right is of primary concern

Intelligence test

Bungie has been busy completely re-writing the AI routines for *Halo 2*. Expect enemies to react en masse to threats and use scenery and vehicles to either provide a greater advantage in killing Master Chief or for enlisting help from others.

Halo was criticised for its repetitive geometry, but sketches suggest that more detail is going into the environment design for the sequel. The team claims the locales will be a lot closer to the concept art this time

and on the hidden motives for their attacks against humanity."

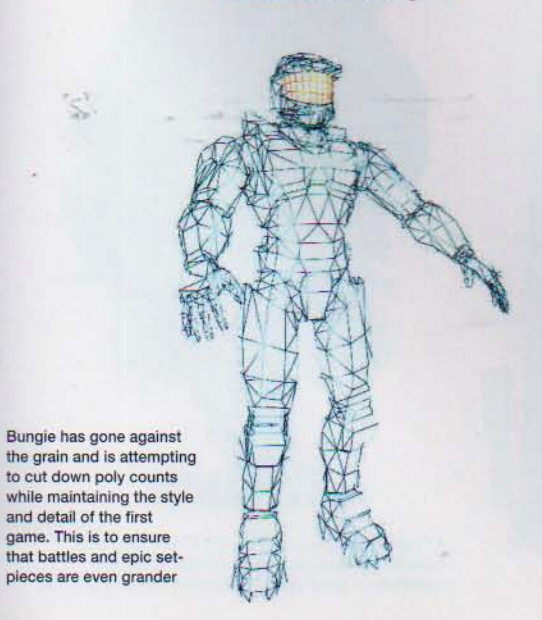
The Prophets, in particular, will be an interesting addition to the *Halo* bestiary, promising unique attacks and a greater influence over the other Covenant forces. And just as the Flood delivered a shock to the system in *Halo*, Bungie is to introduce at least one completely new alien race to provide those three-way battles that epitomised the excellence of the first game.

Tentatively labelled Brutes, this new breed of foe is likely to offer another layer of depth and variety to the experience.

Bungie is keenly aware that expectations are high for its sequel, hence the philosophy of concentrating on depth rather than simple expansion. "The main objective we want to achieve with *Halo 2* is to take the unique combat experience and put it in a more interesting context," adds Griesemer. "Most of the combat in *Halo* was driven by story elements – simple 'get from point A to point B' objectives. We want to provide more interesting situations and goals in *Halo 2*. So we're focusing a lot of attention on our mission and environment design, taking what we learned from *Halo* and using that to make *Halo 2* as varied and deep as possible."

In real terms this means that there will be much less replication in the environments, the one element that received criticism in the original. Climates will vary, there will be more exterior locations with vegetation and every location will have a "function and a context." Although Bungie would neither confirm nor deny that complex cities are to make it to the sequel, the fact that the the scenarios are to be more "organic" with aliens and marines

"We're focusing a lot of attention on our mission and environment design, taking what we learned from Halo and using that to make Halo 2 as varied and deep as possible"

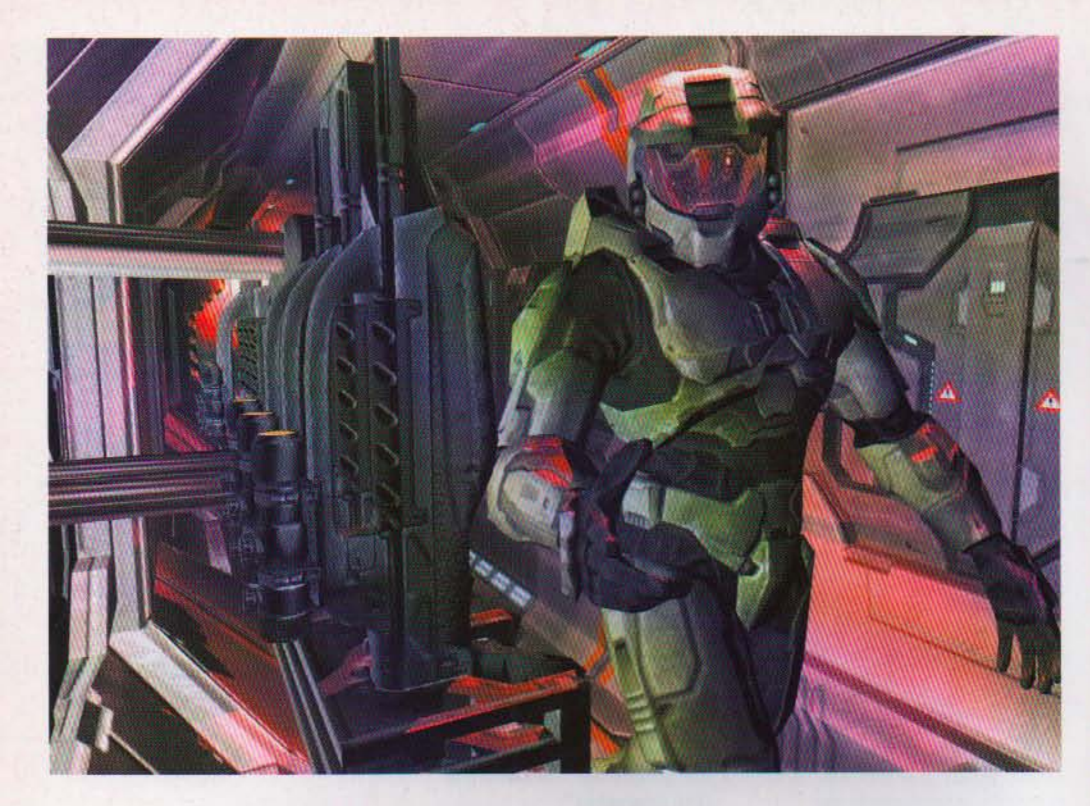








Bungie has gone against the grain and is attempting to cut down poly counts while maintaining the style and detail of the first game. This is to ensure that battles and epic set-pieces are even grander



interacting with their environments in more sophisticated ways, hints that the developer is going in this direction. For *Halo 2* the geometry isn't replicated, the level shells are built and then filled with detailed objects to make each space unique and interesting. It's a process that required a complete re-engineering of the game engine.

To bolster the sense that the *Halo 2* world is operating independently, there will be an overhaul of the AI (something that was hardly shoddy the first time around). "At GDC this year we did a talk on *Halo*'s AI," reveals Griesemer. "This means that we had to come up with a whole new batch of secrets for *Halo 2*.

"In *Halo* the AI concentrated almost exclusively on shooting enemies and not being shot. In *Halo 2* we are going to extend the AI's ability to manipulate its world and move through the environment in intelligent ways. We're also improving the AI's ability to make plans and react to enemy tactics on a larger scope, so entire installations will respond to the player's attack instead of just the enemies in the room with him. In *Halo 2* AI entities will be able to adapt to their environment."

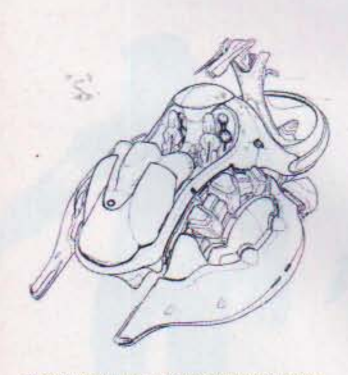
But expansion junkies should not be disappointed. Yes, the game will be 'deeper', but there's a list of expansions to assuage those more impressed by box stats. Along with those extra outdoor environments will be a new sniper weapon, a sub-machine gun that fires caseless ammo, three new marine ATVs suited to different terrain and the Shadow, a new Covenant vehicle capable of carrying up to four Elites. And these are just the new elements Bungie is willing to divulge at this stage.

Saturday night live

The announcement of Xbox Live (see p6) raises questions about the game's multiplayer features. *Halo* remains a firm **Edge** lunchtime multiplayer favourite, but while it's unlikely that bots are going to make it to the sequel, there are compensations. "The main focus of our multiplayer efforts on *Halo 2* is the squad-oriented, two-team online game. It will feature Human Spartans versus Covenant Elites and will attempt to capture the oneplayer *Halo* experience in an online setting. Instead of the gametypes of *Halo*, the online game will be a real battle with real objectives, supporting events such as airstrikes, and lots of carnage."

This will all be supported by the Xbox Live network. Bungie is keen not to replicate PC multiplayer gaming, where players often feel isolated as if "playing a game by yourself, but the enemy characters have their own AI supplied by other humans." Griesemer wants players to feel like they are sitting on the couch next to each other though they could be in another state. To achieve this the cooperative element will be the focus, and you can also expect the Voice Communicator device to play a large part in generating this sense of close collaboration.

One year and counting. Yes, if Bungie hits its targets then this time next year we'll be very aware of how successful the developer has been at layering even more depth into the experience. The fact that the focus is firmly on making the AI more reactive and improving environment complexity is a positive sign that *Halo 2* could be just as monumental as its predecessor. The wait is going to be agonising, but it's testament to the quality of *Halo* that it's the only FPS that can keep us going until winter 2003.



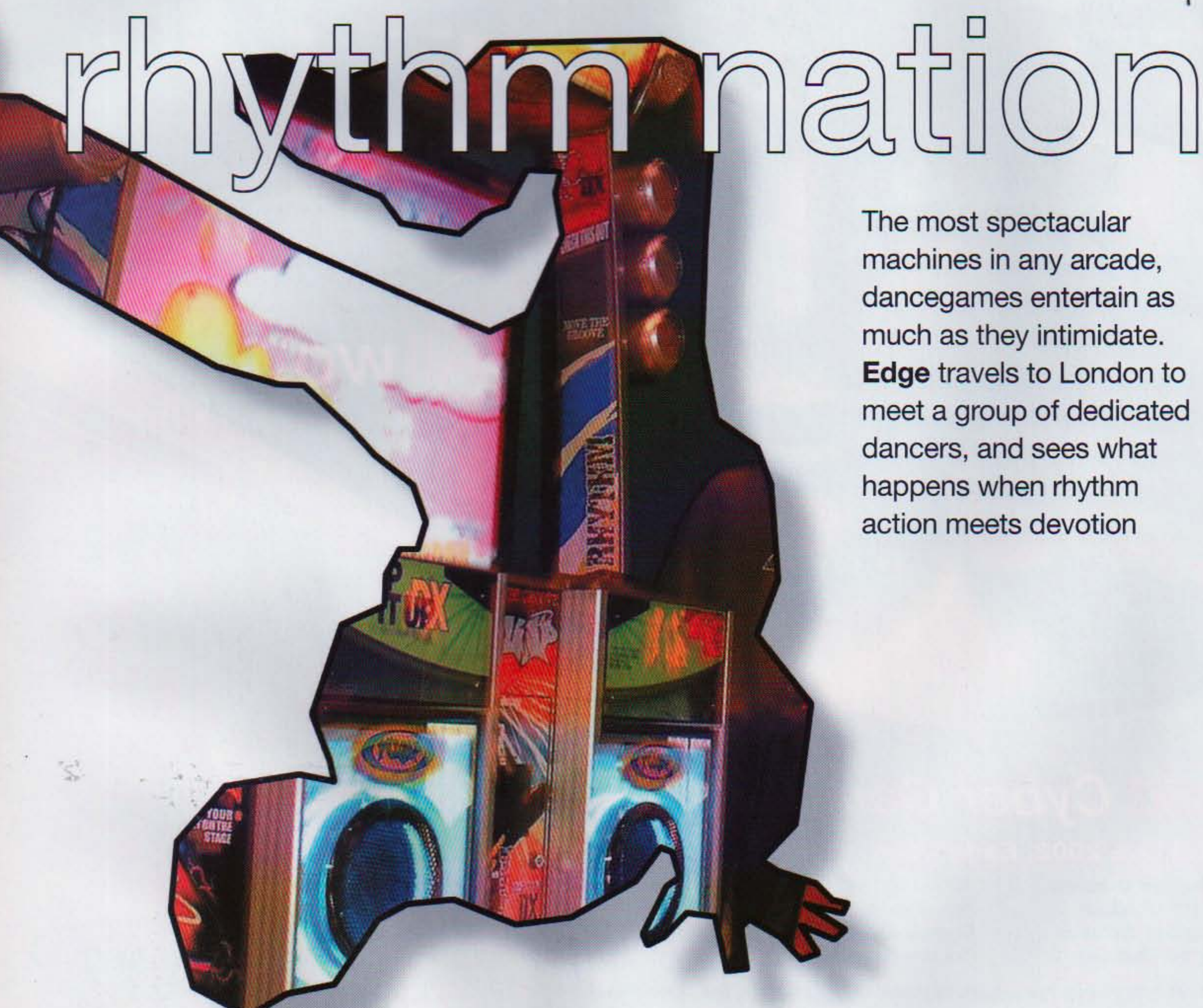
The Shadow, a new Covenant vehicle that is able to carry up to four Elites into battle





A Prophet sitting in an anti-gravity throne (left). Their headdresses are unique so you're able to identify individuals. A damn angry ape (above). Probably dirty, too

rhythm nation



The most spectacular machines in any arcade, dancegames entertain as much as they intimidate. **Edge** travels to London to meet a group of dedicated dancers, and sees what happens when rhythm action meets devotion



From 'The Complete Unofficial Dance Dance Revolution Series FAQ, version 0.573', on the subject of injury:

"Blisters. Symptoms: sore feet consisting of localised pain in one particular area of the foot, including toes and arches. Affects: most of your foot. Occurrence: playing for 2–6 hours. Diagnosis: look at your feet. When playing DDR, blisters generally appear on the sides of your feet, just on the inside bottom half of your foot (barely up from your heel), on the insides or your toes and on the area under your toes."

It is a Saturday afternoon at the start of summer, and there are between 60 and 70 people gathered around the *Pump It Up* machine at the Trocadero's Funland. **Edge** has arranged for a handful of them to be there so the photo shoot goes to plan, but this is social gaming, so they've brought their friends and their friends have brought their friends, and so on. No big deal – it's a Saturday, and most would have come here anyway. The group swells with uninvited onlookers, people drawn in by the sight of a crowd, but fixated by the performance. When the dancers eventually move to the other machines the crowd dissipates, disappointed. The Troc gang flocks, the crowd reforms somewhere else. This is not unusual. This happens every Saturday.

Not just here, either – there are thriving pockets of dancegaming in arcades across the country – but London is as good a place to start as any, if just for the diversity. There are three dancegames in Funland. *Dancing Stage Euromix*, Konami's European version of *Dance Dance Revolution*, is the best known. That's not surprising, since as well as being the





Shane Henry

Dancegames fact: Shane's five favourite *DDR* songs are 'Stomp to My Beat', 'Dam Dariram', 'Afronova', 'Dub-I-Dub', and 'Dynamite Rave'



Kev Chan

Dancegames fact: Offers this advice, "It's best to learn the moves yourself rather than copying. I mostly like to break and pop"



Curt Chapman

Dancegames fact: sees the future of dancegaming as "untold numbers of sensors that see how you actually dance and score you according to that." He can't wait

original dancegame, it's the only one available for consoles. It's also physically the simplest, superficially at least. There are four pads – forwards, backwards, left and right – and arrows move up the screen in time with the music. Hit the pads at the right time and you get points. Miss and you fail.

Sensory overload

That rule holds for the other two machines too. *Pump It Up* and *EZ2Dancer* are the Korean rivals to Konami's six-year-old series. *Pump It Up* offers five pads instead of four, placed on the diagonals of a three-by-three square. It is the geographical inverse of *Dance Dance Revolution*.

EZ2Dancer is a little more complex. There are three feet sensors in the centre of the machine, each one a third of a large circle. Those are complimented by chest-high movement sensors, stubby metal outcrops just in front of the pad that detect motion immediately above and below. The sensors are designed to be activated by hands. That would be too simple.

"Bruising. Symptoms: localised pain on a body part. Affects: pretty much anywhere. Typically hands, knees, elbows or head. Occurrence: hands bruised when arrow pads are slapped, or missed and metal is accidentally slapped. Knees bruised when 'knee drop' performance moves are performed incorrectly, especially when the metal triangle-shaped part on each corner of each arrow is accidentally contacted. Head bruised when screen or buttons on cabinet are butted too hard."

There are two ways of playing dancegames at the top level: stepping and freestyling. Steppers are orthodox players who play by the book. They set the difficulty to the highest level, and the arrows scream, and the feet fly in stupendously fast patterns. It is as the game was originally intended – a test of agility, reaction, and as impressive as it is intimidating. But it is not what **Edge** is here today to see. It is not what bruises.

Freestyling involves taking the difficulty level down a few notches, but adding style and aerobatics. Pads are hit by knees, hands, heads. Anything can activate the sensors; the wilder the move, the bigger the reaction, and the more respect the



"Each machine has a steel backbar. Once you've watched freestylers play it is difficult to imagine it being used for anything other than vaulting, twisting and flipping"

Photography: Martin Thompson


PUMP IT UP DX
ANDAMIRO
MOVE THE GROOVE
STOP

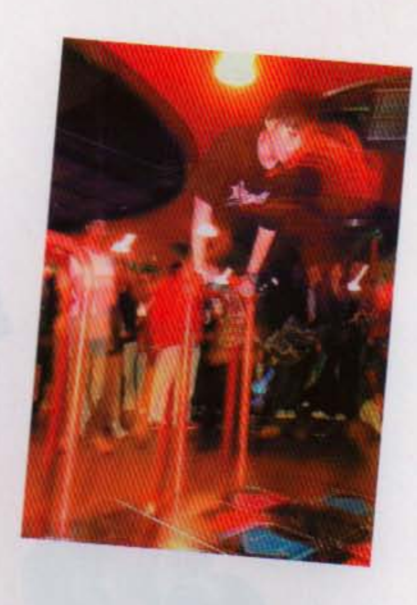


dancer gains. "Freestylers are the crowd pleasers," says **Jonathan Chan**, one of the players playing showoff. "Steppers go for the harder difficulty settings, but freestylers show all sorts of different skills. I'm not too adept at stepping. I'm good at freestyle."

They all are. There is a moment midway through the afternoon when **Winson Ting**, self-styled as modestly good (most would claim that he's substantially better than that), has his face pressed against the protective glass of the *Pump It Up* machine, his body lying across the start buttons on the lip of the machine. It's not entirely clear why he's doing this, but the crowd take it as nonchalantly as they have any of the day's action. There are murmurs, giggles, as the music begins and he twists himself down onto the pads.

Another example. Each machine also has a steel backbar which becomes a crucial part of the self-set routines. Perhaps it is designed for balance, or to stop onlookers from encroaching onto the playing surface. Once you have watched freestylers play it is difficult to imagine it being used for anything other than vaulting, twisting and flipping. It comes in particularly





useful on *EZ2Dancer*; rather than activating the motion sensors with their hands, players pivot off the bar and use their feet to break the beams of light, often passing over both sensors in one graceful movement. It is something to see.

Making moves

And there are more. From the moves dictionary on dancegames.com, "180° mute air. Bar stall to 360° revert. Pyramid spin. Matrix walk." The last involves jumping up, running across the machine's screen, and then grudgingly allowing gravity back into your life. **Shane Henry** – who we will meet again in a moment – did that once, and still calls it his most impressive trick. **Curt Chapman**'s? "An accidental front flip. It was supposed to be a handstand, but it got a good response from the crowd. Although I was a little shocked." He'd like to be able to do a backflip someday. Dangerous, apparently. Jackass culture declares that irrelevant. Whatever. Tiring.

"Energy Depletion. Symptoms: faintness, loss of awareness. Lack of physical motivation to play even if you want to. No strength. Able to do a song until one becomes confused, starts stepping in a swaying, stunned kind of motion, and generally feels unhealthy. A general feeling of loss of energy. Occurrence: usually, but not strictly, at home. Continuing to play could cause giddiness, or possibly even cause one to pass out. Affects: the ability to play decently or comfortably."

Shane Henry is running. A minute before he was dancing on the *Dancing Stage Euromix* to 'Luv to Me', a hyper slice of lachrymose Japanese techno ("you said that you loved me/look at me softly/you kissed me and held me all night so tight"). Two minutes before that he was discussing plans with friends; there is a shrug, a nod, pound coins go in the slot and the music is chosen. It starts, and the arrows come.

Halfway through the song it is clear something is going to happen. The cognoscenti start screaming at the crowd to move out of the way – not aggressively, but grinning, excited. Shane glances back at them, and then, just as the song reaches a break and there is some respite from the flood of arrows, he swings around the bar and starts to run away from the machine. Which is why Shane Henry is running.

Running man

He keeps running, right until he reaches the back of the room, some 30 yards away. For a moment he disappears as he loops around the back of the escalator, then reappears hurtling back towards the machine. The arrows appear on the bottom of the screen again, start to flow upwards.

"I never really used to dance before, but playing dancegames gave me the confidence to try it, and now I'm learning new styles, new techniques"





KitKat
Dancegames fact: The most enthusiastic of the dancers, and effectively an unofficial cheerleader for the Trocadero crew



Alvin
Dancegames fact: None. Very enigmatic



Jonathan Chan
Dancegames fact: describes his dancing style as "streetstyle, with some popping, locking and liquids"



Zach
Dancegames fact: owns an impressive jacket with red tassles. Tassles blur and sweep with each spectacular move; it's like clothing hypnosis



Jangho Kwon
Dancegames fact: Loves the diversity of dancegames. Claims that he once saw a 40-year-old man dancing better than him



Winson Ting
Dancegames fact: Winner of the national *DDR* and *Pump* titles. Causes murmur of excitement to sweep the room when he inserts coin

Shane must reach the pads before they hit the top, but he is close now – maybe five yards away – crowd bubbling with delight, twitching their heads between him and the machine. He leaps, places his hands on the back-bar and leapfrogs it; as he comes down, the arrows come up, and as his feet hit the pads the beat hits too and the machine flashes up 'Perfect'. He continues to dance, and everyone is cheering.

Shane will later do one song on *Pump It Up* on double [playing across both pads] and invisible [playing without any guiding arrows]. He ignores the screen, not that it offers assistance anyway, and faces the audience throughout. "I think I'm alright," he says. "But there's always room for improvement. I never really used to dance before, but playing dancegames gave me the confidence to try it, and now I'm learning new styles, new techniques."

Community spirit

Winson Ting claims dancegames help players maintain concentration skills and keep fit and, faced with examples such as those described above, it's difficult to argue. They are utterly compulsive, entirely hypnotic. While beginners may (wrongly) class the atmosphere as intimidating, the show-off culture isn't aggressive. Players help players – "We play for fun, encourage each other to raise our game," says Ting – and newcomers are welcomed.

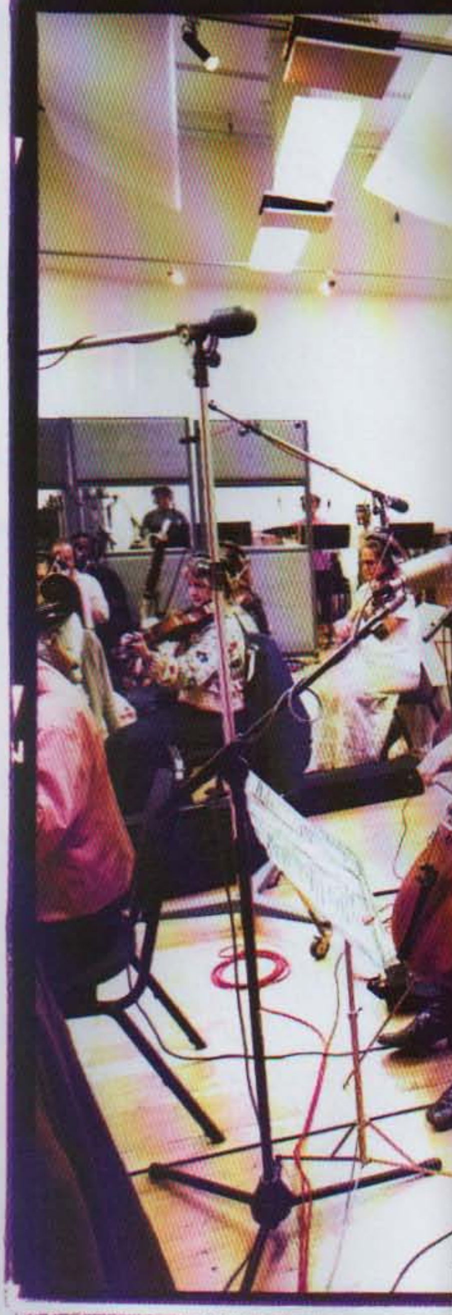
"It's so good to see so many people come together because of one love," agrees **Jangho Kwon**. "I've had so many experiences, made so many friends, done so many things I never thought I'd do. It has changed my life. I can't really explain it in words..." A bit like the hypnotic rush of playing; past the beginning, there is a stage where phrasing links directly to your legs, and you don't have to think. Reaching that is important. Hours past that, though, there is a stage where the legs stop to work, and while the arrows keep going, the feet refuse to follow. It is still difficult to stop. Sometimes you should.

"I've had so many experiences, made so many friends, done so many things I never thought I'd do. It has changed my life. I can't really explain it in words..."

"Pneumothorax – collapsed lung. Symptoms: extreme pain in one lung. Difficulty in breathing, particularly when bending over or lying down. Inability to exert yourself – ie to play DDR*. Occurrence: perhaps not caused by* DDR *at all – I'm no doctor, but it seems to me that it is stress on the lung that is the cause. There is no way to avoid this. It usually strikes suddenly with absolutely no forewarning. Affects: the ability to play. Period."*

Stupidly extreme, obscenely unlikely, but oddly appropriate. When it takes a life-threatening illness to stop people from doing something, you know that something has to be sublime. Witness it – thrill in the crowd – and you'll have an idea. Then it follows; you become part of it, and you don't want to stop dancing either. Not for anything.


PUMP IT UP DX
PUMP IT UP
STOMP YOUR FEET ON THE STAGE



Orchestral



manoeuvres

Game sound used to be a mixture of midi bleeps and squeaks. Now, however, the purse strings are being opened and full orchestral sessions are the order of the day

Sony's recording studio in Whitfield Street, central London is full. It's so full, you can hardly get down the corridor to the control room, jam-packed as it is with double bass, cello and even harp cases. "We were going to have 66 players but decided to add an extra set of strings to give us more power to compete with the percussion," explains an excited **Nick Laviers**, head of audio for EA's second Harry Potter game, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

Slowly the 77 players shuffle in their seats, checking the score which they haven't seen before. Veteran conductor John Scott attempts to settle them. They put on their headphones, making sure all mobile phones are switched off. "Should we



Photography: Nick Wilson

have a bass clarinet in bars 22 to 27?" someone queries. Scott wanders off to the control room to ask.

In Vancouver, at the other end of an ISDN line, is the composer Jeremy Soule with his arranger Larry Kenton. Some discussion and much turning of scores ensue before everything is sorted and the Philharmonia Orchestra can attempt its first run through of the 124-second cue entitled 'Burrows'. It's a magical piece building on the themes of the previous film score. It also has a hint of Christmas about it, which is appropriate as it will be the first thing the millions of players of the game will hear when they start playing, this Christmas.

The band plays on

At least, they will when Jeremy Soule is finally happy with the recording. He rejects several takes, asking for minor adjustments here and there. After another run through, one of the cellists asks whether he should be playing G natural or F sharp in bar 22. There's also an issue with the keys of the music for the duet between the piano and the celeste, which don't seem to work in unison. "Don't worry, the first track is always the longest to get right," someone says as time (and money) tick away. Four takes and 40 minutes later however, everyone is content. It's time to move onto another arrangement. It's a 32-second cue for the in-game quidditch match.

"It was a bit intense, wasn't it?" says Laviers a couple of days later. "A good orchestra is supposed to be able to do four minutes of music per hour but they tell you to budget for nine minutes over three hours just to be on the safe side." Laviers managed to get eight minutes completed to everyone's satisfaction within two hours. "I was worried because the conductor told me the second cue they had to record was one of the most complicated scores he's ever seen," he continues with a grin. "I think that was Jeremy flexing his muscles."

It may not seem like much – the biggest game publisher in the world spending £20,000-odd on a two-hour recording session for an extremely high-profile game. But it demonstrates a sea-change happening in the industry.

Sound session: Halo

"I hadn't thought about the music for *Halo* when I had to put together something for the 'MacWorld' movie in 1999," recalls Marty O'Donnell, Bungie's audio director. "We wanted the movie to give the viewer a sense of epic scale and as well as the feeling of something ancient and alien." The result was a mixture of orchestral (epic), Gregorian chant (ancient) and Qwalli chant (alien). "I only had a few days so I went with my first instincts," says O'Donnell, who cut his teeth with the score for *Riven*.

The composition occurred in Bungie's sound studio using Pro-Tools and the usual array of keyboards and samplers. The live recordings were carried out with members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra. O'Donnell and collaborator Mike Salvatori also added their vocal talents. And budgeted at an estimated $40,000 in terms of external costs, the price was relatively cheap.





Everyone agrees that games development needs to mature, and the use of orchestras is one example of that transformation in action. Not purely because publishers are prepared to cover the cost, or even that the hardware itself can support the high-quality playback of a 77-piece orchestra but because, in this respect at least, games as an entertainment medium have reached a comparable level to films.

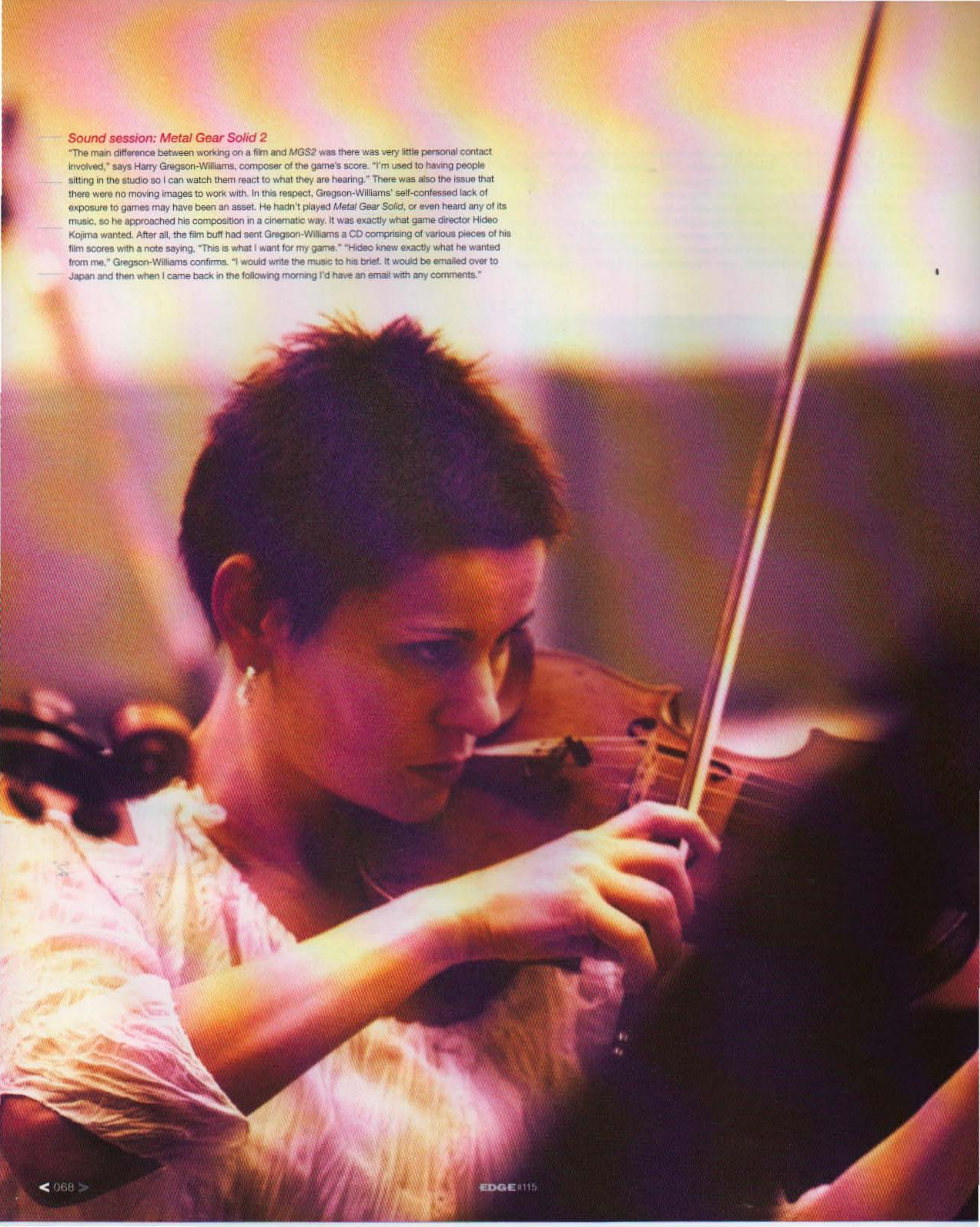
"Our mantra is this quote from Steven Spielberg: 'Sound and music make up more than half of communicating a story, greater even than what you are seeing,'" says **Bob Rice**, CEO of Four Bars Intertainment, the US management company for many of the rising stars of game sound composition, including Jeremy Soule.

A veteran of a career in the music industry, Rice is a strong evangelist of the power of the highest quality music in games. "Not only does it increase the sales of games but it can produce extraordinary incremental income to companies," he points out, citing James Horner's 'Titanic' soundtrack as the ultimate example in the film industry. He predicts that a game soundtrack will soon sell between 100,000 and a million copies. "Someday a company will be formed to produce and market soundtracks of music from games," he continues. "After a little maturing, this company will start producing and releasing singles written specifically for a game, which will enjoy traditional radio airplay prior to the game being released."

And yet, in a sense these prophecies have already started to be fulfilled.

"Our mantra is this quote from Steven Spielberg: 'Sound and music make up more than half of communicating a story, greater even than what you are seeing'"

In Japan, it's common for game soundtracks from series such as *Shenmue*, *Final Fantasy* or *Biohazard* to be released. Michael Giacchino's groundbreaking *Medal of Honor* soundtrack has received a limited US release, as has **Marty O'Donnell**'s



Sound session: Metal Gear Solid 2

"The main difference between working on a film and *MGS2* was there was very little personal contact involved," says Harry Gregson-Williams, composer of the game's score. "I'm used to having people sitting in the studio so I can watch them react to what they are hearing." There was also the issue that there were no moving images to work with. In this respect, Gregson-Williams' self-confessed lack of exposure to games may have been an asset. He hadn't played *Metal Gear Solid*, or even heard any of its music, so he approached his composition in a cinematic way. It was exactly what game director Hideo Kojima wanted. After all, the film buff had sent Gregson-Williams a CD comprising of various pieces of his film scores with a note saying, "This is what I want for my game." "Hideo knew exactly what he wanted from me," Gregson-Williams confirms. "I would write the music to his brief. It would be emailed over to Japan and then when I came back in the following morning I'd have an email with any comments."

soundtrack for *Halo*. It won the first 'Rolling Stone' award for Game Soundtrack of the Year in 2002.

Some of Hollywood's finest are even getting in on the act. "I don't think most Hollywood film composers play videogames," says **Harry Gregson-Williams**, who has worked on scores such as 'Enemy of the State', 'Shrek' and perhaps most famously, *Metal Gear Solid 2*. "The last game I played was probably *Pong*," he confesses.

Luckily when a package arrived through his door from a certain Hideo Kojima, one of Gregson-Williams' assistants knew what *Metal Gear Solid* was, otherwise the composer would probably have thrown it



"I don't think most Hollywood film composers play videogames," says Harry Gregson-Williams. "The last game I played was probably Pong"

away. "The only reason I took it on was because it was interesting and different to what I had been doing before," he says. "But I did take it very seriously and I would be interested to do more work for games as long as it wasn't doing the same thing over again."

LA instrumental

In a similar way EA is using Hollywood names such as Randy Tom, who did the sound for 'Apocalypse Now', and Eddie Joseph as consultants on the *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* project. "It's a big deal for us," explains Laviers. "Last year we used synthesisers for the score. It was almost as good as a real orchestra, but this year we've decided to record some of the more complex pieces with an acoustic orchestra to get that extra power."

EA has also made the commitment to the important of sound within the development process by re-organising its department. Laviers was head of sound but now just handles *Harry Potter* while a separate team handles the forthcoming rally game *Shox* in conjunction with Global Underground. "I think the days of the sound

A new kind of orchestra

Johnny Carson asked Jack Lemmon, "What's the difference between a great actor and a bad actor?" Lemmon responded, "About ten takes. Any actor can get it eventually." According to Four Bars Intertainment's Bob Rice, the same is true for orchestras. "The right orchestra for the job is the one the composer wants," he says. "Although one orchestra may cost less than another, the composer knows the surface price is false. The right orchestra is the one that can produce the most minutes of the type of music needed on a per hour basis."

There's certainly plenty of choice. EA's Nick Laviers looked at using orchestras in Munich, Prague and Seattle before settling on the London-based Philharmonia. "London orchestras are expensive but I think they're the best, which is why so many US film soundtracks get recorded here," he says.

And now there's even one orchestra specifically set up for game soundtrack work. Called the Nimrod Symphony Orchestra (NSO) and handled by game sound specialist Couchlife, it's already undertaken work for Infogrames. "There are a lot of other orchestras around but the NSO and its associated production team, conductor and composer Dr Jon Williams and studio is gearing exclusively to the production of game music," explains **Marc Hassall**, Nimrod's director. "We're filling a niche, providing a cost-effective UK-based solution to recording an orchestra."

Richard Jacques



Nick Laviers



Harry Gregson-Williams



Marty O'Donnell



Jeremy Soule



Bob Rice

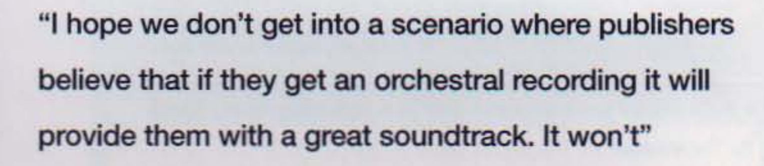


guy sitting alone in his room are over," says Laviers. "Too often they end up getting into battles with the producer with no one to support them. It's the biggest shame of the industry, but I think it's changing." Laviers works with a team of four sound designers, as well as his consultants and composers.

One composer whose one-man band days are over is **Richard Jacques**, the erstwhile in-house sound man at Sega Europe. Since its downsizing, Jacques has become a freelance composer. His last Sega job was the orchestral score for *Headhunter* however. "People expect the more cinematic-style of games to have a high quality of music," he explains. "Games look so realistic, the music needs to be as good in its own way." Sega and *Headhunter* developer Amuze agreed and Jacques got a budget of £120,000 to spend on three days of recording with the London Session Orchestra at Abbey Road.

Eidos is another publisher which is prepared to up its budgets. All previous *Tomb Raider* games used synthesised orchestras. *The Angel of Darkness*, however, has seen Core in-house musicians Peter Connelly and **Martin Iveson** heading through the doors of Abbey Road for two three-hour sessions with the London Symphony Orchestra. "The big difference using an orchestra is the separation between instruments. You can hear everything that's going on. The whole sound is spacious unlike the sequenced versions," explains Iveson.

But before everyone jumps on what is clearly becoming something of a bandwagon, Richard Jacques says a


"I hope we don't get into a scenario where publishers believe that if they get an orchestral recording it will provide them with a great soundtrack. It won't"



certain amount of caution is in order: an orchestral score isn't appropriate for all games. "It only suits a limited number of genres. It should not become the norm for games," he says. "I hope we don't get into a scenario where developers and publishers believe that if they get an orchestral recording it will provide them with a great soundtrack. It won't."

Pepsi challenge

Perhaps more important is his supposition that many players can't tell the difference between a real and synthesised orchestra. "In laboratory-controlled conditions the majority would be able to tell, but when gamers are actually playing a game I think it's harder to tell the difference," he says. This is particularly the case if the composer doesn't use the orchestra properly. "The problem with electronically-produced orchestral scores is that many composers and producers don't know what a real orchestra sounds like," he warns.

As for the future, as Rice points out, the convergence between film and game music will work both ways. "John Williams used to do the music for the TV show 'Gilligan's Island' while Danny Elfman was in the rock band Oingo Boingo. Game composers such as Jeremy Soule and Inon Zur (*Galleon*) are cutting their music chops for games. There's no reason they can't climb the ladder as did John and Danny."

"We want the sound in our games to be as good if not better than movie sound and I think we're getting to that stage," says Laviers. The next stage will be to use the interactivity of games to do things with game sound that films can't. "Interactivity is a double-edge sword but handled properly, it will allow game sound to surpass film sound," he predicts.



the mame game

If you were born in the '70s and are reading this, then it's likely that the words Mr. Do!, Spy Hunter and Zaxxon have a way of making your eyes go misty and your mind go wandering into the past. Edge examines MAME's increasing popularity and looks to the future of the nostalgia craze



When **Edge** published the first ever print magazine article about MAME back in 1997 (**E**45), the emulator only ran half a dozen games. Today, the number of ROMs available to download is numbered in the thousands. "It's safe to say I never for a second imagined how enormous it would become," states the author of that piece and self-confessed retrogame connoisseur, **Stuart Campbell**. "To my mind – and I'm perfectly serious here – it's by far the greatest and most important piece of videogaming code ever written. In an industry desperate to pretend that its history never happened and that game design was always as lazy and formulaic as it is now, MAME is a beacon, created by people towards whom the industry not only isn't grateful, it's actually violently hostile."

And the daggers are out. One of the Web's most popular haunts for MAME enthusiasts, http://www.mame.dk, was recently threatened with legal action from a 'copyright holder'. For the site it was time to comply or die. The officiousness of just one company meant that the popular portal had to delete over 3000 ROMs – games such as the beloved *Vulcan Venture* and the cherished *Hyper Sports*. "We take 250,000 page hits per day despite the fact we are now only an information repository," laments one of the sites Webmasters, **DigDug**. "In the old days we did 2,000,000 per day."

And arguably, MAME has just become more accessible and important than ever. The Xbox's off-the-shelf PC architecture had homebrew coders salivating months before the machine was even launched. And just a few months later, MAME was running on Microsoft's first home console. It's a situation that unsettles a corporation used to being in complete control. But understandably so. Using MAME on the Xbox requires a chip and to Microsoft chipping equals piracy. Because the company is still making an undisclosed loss on every machine sold it must reap back the profit in software sales. As highlighted in **E**114 ('Cracker's delight', p7) Microsoft will not tolerate any form of chipping or use of its source code for homebrew projects. Go to the http://xbox.mame.net/ home page and the forlorn message left there is a stark reminder of the weight Microsoft can shift.

But there's a chance, even though it's a small one, that MAME might still come to an Xbox near you, and legally. The main reason Xbox MAME provoked the wrath of Microsoft is because it was compiled using an Xbox dev kit which inserted Microsoft copyrighted code into the MAME binary. Compile MAME without any copyrighted material and Microsoft would have little grounds for complaint. However, "there is currently no way to compile Xbox games without it as far as I know," says **Mark Colgan**, Webmaster of http://www.mameworld.net. "But if someone could produce a thirdparty development kit or get Linux working on Xbox then a port of Linux MAME would be feasible." And with the fervent homebrew activity currently concentrated on Xbox, such a scenario may not be a long way off.

So, what's the fear? Why are publishers so determined to prevent a minority of enthusiasts playing back catalogues of 2D games? Greed is an obvious place to start. Recently – and probably triggered by MAME's success – more than one company has sniffed the intensifying musk of nostalgia in the air. Infogrames recently released the *Atari Anniversary Edition*, Konami put the *Konami Collector's Series: Arcade Classics* into stores, and





Midway reanimated *Defender* and *Joust* for the Game Boy in 2000. In belt-tightening times, the facile re-publishing of old games offers a no-lose revenue stream for publishers, however much of a trickle it actually turns out to be.

Campbell is unequivocal about the moral implications of downloading ROMs for use with MAME. "Only a complete idiot would regard it as piracy in any meaningful way. Games companies have made all the money they deserve to out of these games already – in the rare cases that the original publishers are still in business anyway. In closing down Websites, the games industry is displaying the sort of short-sighted, narrow-minded, mean-spirited fatuous stupidity of which it's so depressingly often guilty. Complaining that it might damage the sales of retro packages is dumb – charging £35–40 for about five 20-year-old games on a cart or disc that could easily hold 20 times as many is what damages retro package sales. That and the fact that the 'emulation' of the game is often of significantly poorer quality than that offered by MAME anyway."

But MAME has never been just about overcoming a technical challenge. Many believe that alongside delivering gaming from the golden era of coin-ops it's an archive as important to the videogame industry as the Bodlian is to world culture. Mame.dk survives because there's a new breed of historian: the kind that avidly searches for and logs every piece of information there is to know about the emergence of videogame entertainment. It's a rich heritage that deserves such treatment. Along with technical information about the games, you can discover full lists of the creators, bugs, cheats, sleeve notes, Easter eggs, even reproductions of the artwork around the screens.

More importantly still, MAME offers quality gameplay. Those who believe the coin-op industry declined because consoles began to deliver arcade standard games in the home only want to hear half the truth. 50 pence, three-minute-play maxim is the only language coin-op manufacturers and amusement arcade owners understand.

What follows is a celebration of the golden age of gaming, delivered via MAME. No better appreciation of the compulsion to revisit such classics can be summarised better than by a long time MAME veteran and enthusiast himself. **Goose** has been playing the MAME game since it was established back in 1997. "MAME allows you to experience games you remember playing in 1985, games you glimpsed in a magazine, games you saw through the crack in the door at Gold Rush, games you couldn't afford to play then, games that are legendary and influential, games that redefined genres and that built upon established ones. Quirky games, weird games, games that defy description and some that were merely run-of-the-mill. Games that contain more gameplay in their first level than the first day's play on *Final Fantasy X*. Ultimately, it's not about ROMS, history, legal issues or graphics, it's about the games and the gameplay. And for that alone, I don't think MAME can be beaten."

"In an industry desperate to pretend that its history never happened and that game design was always as lazy and formulaic as it is now, MAME is a beacon"

Despite elaborate cabinets and hydraulic mechanisms arcade gaming is a shadow of its former self. Coin-ops such as *Galaga*, *Salamander*, *Asteroids* and *Commando* gave players an opportunity to hone their skills, and then, show-off in front of the peer group. Once mastered, a classic coin-op game could keep a skilled player occupied for hours on one ten pence piece alone. That crucial element of mastery over machine has been lost from amusement centres the world over. Now, simple economics mean that the

History game:

In 1996 a reclusive Italian engineer called Nicola Salmoria began work on single emulators for individual games on the PC. Early titles included *Mr. Do!*, *Pengo*, *Lady Bug* and a multiple game emulator of various *Pac-Man* games. By January 1997 Salmoria was so pleased with his progress that he decided to combine the programs into a multiple game emulator format. MAME (the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) was born on February 5, 1997 and because of the opensource philosophy of the project, became hugely popular among non-professional coders.

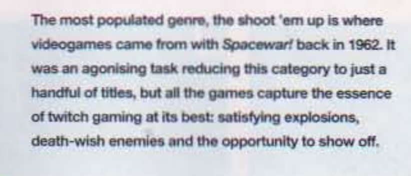
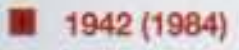
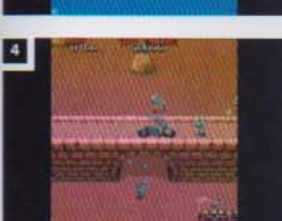
The latest version of MAME supports 3469 ROM sets, or 1959 unique games. Coders need to create a specific application that can read data from an original arcade ROM, often taken directly from the machine's motherboard. The emulator then attempts to recreate the visual and aural experience on a PC. It is completely legal to create an emulation program but there's still a grey area when it comes to playing a game using one. Generally, however, you are entitled to own a backup of any software you have already paid for.

MAME best 100

One hundred sounds like a lot of games, but in truth, the selection process was still agonising. No doubt, some MAME addicts will berate Edge for not selecting greats such as *Dark Tower*, *Dig-Dug* or *Moon Cresta*, but we're confident that the games listed over the following pages accurately represent the breadth and depth of classic arcade gaming. So, sit back, take a deep breath, and prepare yourself for a long overdue dose of nostalgia...

Useful MAME weblinks: http://www.mame.net / http://www.mame.dk / http://www.mameworld.net

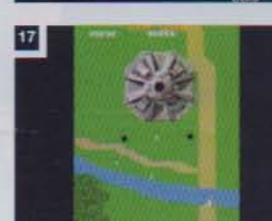









Shoot 'em ups

The most populated genre, the shoot 'em up is where videogames came from with *Spacewar!* back in 1962. It was an agonising task reducing this category to just a handful of titles, but all the games capture the essence of twitch gaming at its best: satisfying explosions, death-wish enemies and the opportunity to show off.

- **1942 (1984)**
  There's really no better place to start than Capcom's tremendous and frenetic WWII blaster. The addition of wingmen added a touch of originality but it was the pumping sound effects and balance that made it heavenly.
- **After Burner (1987)**
- **Asteroids (1979)**
- **Commando (1985)**
  One-man-against-the-world had never been done better before, and *Commando* became an instant hit when it was released by Data East. The end-of-level battles were insane, but the adrenaline rush was well worth the effort.
- **Gorf (1981)**
  It spoke to you. Or more accurately, ordered you to insert money. How could you resist? Designed by Jay Fenton, *Gorf* would even give players a 'space rank' after every go.
- **Gun Smoke (1985)**
- **Ikari Warriors (1986)**
- **Juno First (1983)**
- **Raiden (1990)**
- **Robotron: 2084 (1982)**
  If J Allard is to be believed, the Xbox was conceived after inspirational bouts on this, one of Eugene Jarvis' most respected titles. Defend the last family alive from hordes of Quarks, Grunts, Brains and Hulks. Absolutely blistering.
- **Sinistar (1982)**
- **Smash TV (1990)**
- **Space Harrier (1985)**
  The shock of The New. Everyone remembers seeing *Space Harrier* hulking in their local arcade emporium for the first time. Hydraulic mechanisms and a hefty levy for one play, the title compensated by providing electrifying gameplay.
- **Spy Hunter (1983)**
- **Star Wars (1983)**
- **Tempest (1980)**
  Still stands as one of the most elegant games of all time. Those colourful vector lines just cut straight to the heart. *Tempest* has been successfully resurrected several times, but for purists nothing beats Dave Theurer's original.
- **Xevious (1982)**
- **Zaxxon (1982)**
  It was the first ever isometric arcade game, but this was no mere programming stunt. A finely honed challenge and devious level design made Sega's game such a classic that it was even turned into a board game by Milton Bradley.

Racing games

There are plenty of quality racing titles offered by MAME, but these three embody the best in their respective fields. Good CPU opponents, or a perfectly judged checkpoint system, are crucial. But each of these titles also delivers a cracking sense of speed for those willing to floor the accelerator.



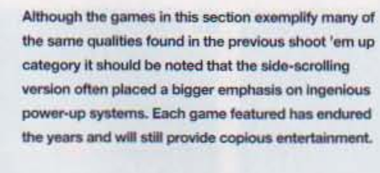


- **Enduro Racer (1986)**
  There had been motorcycle racing games before but *Enduro Racer* had a kinetic feel that made it instantly appealing. Learning how to pull wheelies, time jumps and dodge logs was great fun and helped shave vital seconds off lap times.
- **OutRun (1986)**
  Passing breeze. A Ferrari Testarossa. The open road. *OutRun* was a 'Super Scaler' heaven created by a young Yu Suzuki. Modern driving games are still trying to capture the magic evident in every turn and corner of this masterpiece.
- **Super Sprint (1986)**
  Three pedals, three steering wheels, one cabinet. A recipe for truancy if ever there was one. Throwing the vehicles around each of the tight and beautifully judged tracks was a delight and Atari's wheels were more than up to the task.

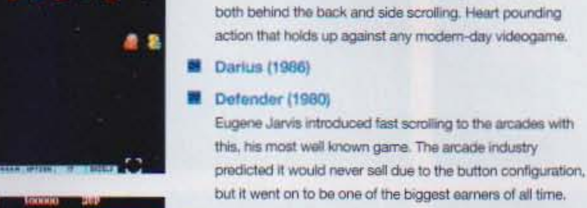
Side-scrolling shoot 'em ups

Although the games in this section exemplify many of the same qualities found in the previous shoot 'em up category it should be noted that the side-scrolling version often placed a bigger emphasis on ingenious power-up systems. Each game featured has endured the years and will still provide copious entertainment.

















- **Choplifter (1985)**
- **Contra (1987)**
  Still one of the greatest games ever conceived. Beautifully balanced, superb audio and a variety of gameplay styles – both behind the back and side scrolling. Heart pounding action that holds up against any modern-day videogame.
- **Darius (1986)**
- **Defender (1980)**
  Eugene Jarvis introduced fast scrolling to the arcades with this, his most well known game. The arcade industry predicted it would never sell due to the button configuration, but it went on to be one of the biggest earners of all time.
- **Metal Slug (1996)**
- **Parodius (1990)**
- **R-Type (1987)**
  Noteworthy for the tremendous power-up system and chargeable shot facility. *R-Type* combined addictive blasting with strategical use of weaponry better than any game before. Amazing organic backdrops were icing on the cake.
- **Salamander (1986)**
- **Side Arms – Hyper Dyne (1986)**
- **Thunder Force AC (1991)**
- **U.N. Squadron (1989)**
  Based on the Japanese anime series 'Area 88', *U.N. Squadron* was an immediate hit on both sides of the world. It was probably the most frenetic example of its type when it was first released and dedicated gamers flocked to it.
- **Last Resort (1992)**
- **Xexex (1991)**

- **720° (1986)**
  Atari's decision to put speakers in a 'boom-box' atop the cabinet was one draw, the absolutely compelling gameplay was the other. *720°* just 'felt' beautiful and was unbeatable until *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* arrived.
- **Combat School (1987)**
  Although similar to Konami's other sports titles, this was unusual for its trackball controller that made the experience all the more enticing. The Iron Man race was an especially novel take on the growing genre.
- **Hyper Sports (1984)**
  The follow-up to Konami's masterful *Track & Field* was even better. Compete in seven Olympic events to win medals and the honour of triumphing over friends at the irresistible skeet shooting. Konami has regurgitated the format several times but this is the most adored.
- **NBA Jam (1993)**
- **Punch-Out!! (1984)**
  The names Glass Joe, Bald Bull and Pizza Pasta will bring a tear to the eye of older gamers. Frighteningly addictive with a well judged learning curve, *Punch-Out!!* still KOs most modern and elaborate boxing titles.
- **Saturday Night Slam Masters (1993)**
- **Track & Field (1983)**





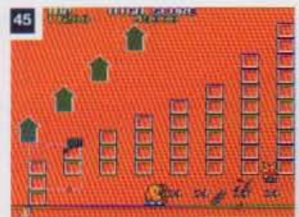


Athletics and sports

These games were all about distilling the competitive spirit into a limited number of bits and bytes. A sturdy cabinet and controls were another must, as distributors could expect a few knocks from the rivalry such titles provoked. Although sports games remain popular, the transition to 3D has done few of them many favours.









Platform games

MAME enthusiasts probably come back to this genre more than any other. Let's face it, a 3D platform game without camera problems has yet to be made. Yet the vast majority of 2D examples have no such niggles and are easily capable of providing heart-stopping and satisfying experiences. These are just a few of the best.

- **Donkey Kong (1981)**

Requiring a US title that approximated to 'stubborn', Shigeru Miyamoto hit upon the mule-like word 'donkey'. Hence the title. Sublime level design and great characterisation, *Donkey Kong* has probably influenced every game designer.

- **Flicky (1984)**
- **Mega Man III (1990)**
- **New Zealand Story, The (1988)**

Taito had already formed a reputation for cute games, but this stands as one of its most saccharine. Not a bad thing. Walrus enemies, bows and arrows and entertaining balloon rides gave it an unmistakeable and irresistible charm.

- **Pac-Land (1984)**
- **Rainbow Islands (1987)**

The spiritual successor to Taito's brilliant *Bubble Bobble* was even better. Featuring levels that were modelled on other classic titles, such as *Arkanoid* and *Darius*, *Rainbow Islands* was a fan's heaven. Surfing rainbows was a delight back in 1987 and still an enjoyable romp by today's standards.

- **Tumblepop (1991)**
- **Wardner (1987)**

Just to prove that no one did platformers better than Taito back in the '80s is *Wardner*, a typical princess rescue game elevated by great character design and those superb shopping excursions between each level.

Puzzle games

There were certainly more arcade games, back in the day, that were willing to challenge your visual-spatial skills as well as the reflexes. It was a combination that made these games some of the most addictive ever conceived. Many have braved the years with convincing fortitude and *Tetris*, *Bomber Man* and *Bust-A-Move* are likely to be hardy favourites ten years from now.

- **Arkanoid (1986)**
- **Bomber Man (1991)**

Like all the best puzzle games it was the simplicity that won you over. The success of *Bomber Man* is told in the countless sequels that have been produced in the intervening years. None has lost that original spark but tenplayer *Saturn Bomber Man* must still rank as the greatest.

- **Bomb Jack (1984)**

Tehkan's superb *Bomb Jack* mixed platforming with strategy in a very clever way. Although bombs could be diffused randomly, the real challenge was stringing together those with fuses already lit. Finding the correct path while avoiding the enemies was absolutely absorbing.

- **Bust-A-Move (1993)**
- **KLAX (1989)**
- **Qix (1981)**

Designed at a time when abstract ideas could still be commercial success stories, *Qix* is probably *the* classic game involving territorial reclamation. Simply avoid the 'qix' and 'sparx' to command more of the screen, but risk moving slower to gain extra point rewards.

- **Snow Bros. (1990)**
- **Solomon's Key (1986)**

One for the more avant garde coin-op junkie, *Solomon's Key* put you in the role of wand-wielding Dana with the power to create and remove blocks to find the key to each level's exit. Collect ten fairies and you would even be granted a free man. Some subtext there, surely?

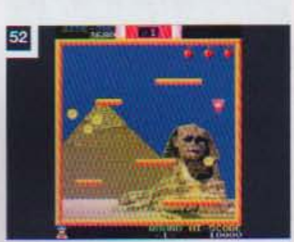
- **Super Pang (1990)**
- **Tetris (1988)**

Now the puzzle game by which all others are judged, *Tetris* is as 'pure' as they come. Six shapes, one joystick and just one button to rotate the blocks made for an instantly understandable challenge that appealed to the left side of anyone's brain, the world over.

- **Uo Poko (1998)**

More unpredictable than *Puzzle Bobble*, but with the same addictive qualities, *Uo Poko* is a recent, though worthy, addition to the MAME catalogue. A cross between pinball and pachinko, the idea is to pull back the plunger and fire coloured gems into the play field, thus setting off a series of chain reactions should the gems match. Wonderful to behold.

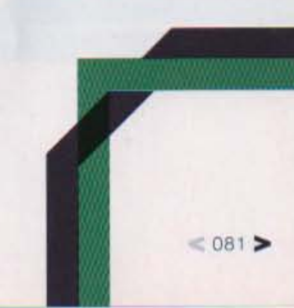


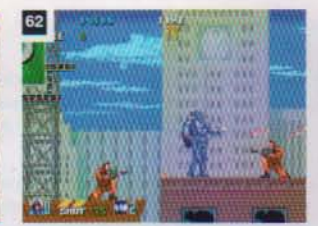




































Side-scrolling fighter

In truth there's not much to separate some of these games from others in the beat 'em up category. But what distinguishes the likes of *Shinobi* and *Bionic Commando* from *Double Dragon* is an extra level of athleticism combined with a greater emphasis on projectile weaponry. Some tough games here, but all thoroughly addictive.

- **Bionic Commando (1987)**
  An oversubscribed genre was transformed in 1987 by Capcom's brilliant *Bionic Commando*, complete with grappling hook addition. In keeping with the mad military atmosphere of the game weapons fell from the sky via parachutes. Novel, frenetic and completely engrossing.
- **ESWAT Cyber Police (1989)**
- **Ghouls 'n' Ghosts (1988)**
  After the runaway success of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* Capcom was expected to improve with a sequel. *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* delivered, with a game that was, if anything, harder but more enthralling than the original. Intricate level design, then, but too frustrating for today's audience.
- **Green Beret (1985)**
  Came along just when the Cold War was heating up for the American media, *Green Beret* was even more successful in the US than it was in Japan. Starting out by merely stabbing Russians, your hero eventually moved on to rocket launchers and flamethrowers. Tremendous.
- **Joe and Mac (1991)**
- **Ninja Spirit (1988)**
  It had all the qualities of Sega's superb *Shinobi* but if anything, quicker reflexes were required to master this inimitable piece of silicon heaven. Charging up using the 'spirit self' extra was crucial to success as enemies never let up. Again, excellent audio and visuals put this in triple-A class.
- **Ninja Warriors, The (1988)**
- **Nun Chackun (1985)**
- **Rastan (1987)**
- **Rolling Thunder (1986)**
  The creepy minions of sinister organisation Geldra were just looking for a pummelling. As agent Albatross it was your task to take out Geldra's boss, Maboo and rescue agent Leila Blitz in the process. Well balanced with unusual sprite design, *Rolling Thunder* is well worth resurrecting.
- **Rygar – Legendary Warrior (1986)**
- **Shao-Lin's Road (1985)**
- **Shadow Dancer (1989)**
- **Shinobi (1987)**
  Among all of Sega's rich back catalogue *Shinobi* still stands as one of the most cherished. Joe Musashi, master of ninjitsu, must rescue hostages from the evil Zeed syndicate. The game rewarded more subtle play and avoiding the use of magic and shuriken resulted in big bonuses.
- **Strider (1989)**
  Capcom created a novel twist on the martial arts theme by introducing a futuristic ninja in Strider Hiryu. Like all the games listed here, *Strider* delivered a well judged learning curve but it was the combination of delicate audio and colourful backdrops that gave *Strider* its unique feel.

Miscellaneous

How can you codify the addictive nonsense that is *Toobin'* or the outright oddity that is *Root Beer Tapper*? True, some of these titles could be classified as maze games, but even *Pac-Man* seems to transcend such simple classification. All these games defy easy labelling and richly deserve a mention on weirdness alone.

- **Gauntlet (1984)**
  Choose Thor, Questor, Merlin or Thydra and defeat infinite monsters in Atari's hugely entertaining slugathon. A fourplayer game was not unheard of back in 1984, but it had never been done with such verve and energy.
- **Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1985)**
  The theme music alone was enough to entice any teenager over to this slice of quality movie licensing. It distilled all the crucial moments from the film into a superb arcade adventure. Definitely worth revisiting.
- **I, Robot (1983)**
  The year is 1983 and fully shaded polygons enter a coin-op near you. Wow. Despite the shock of The New, videogamers did not take to the 3D visuals and it disappeared almost as soon as it had arrived.
- **Joust (1982)**
  It may have standard platforms but *Joust* was a very peculiar bird indeed. Progress is made by taking to the air on your ostrich steed and defeating buzzard-mounted enemies. Strange and compelling.
- **Marble Madness (1984)**
  Still one of the greatest inertia games ever made, *Marble Madness* required honed reflexes and a Dominic O'Brien-strength memory to negotiate its twisty, intricate paths. *Super Monkey Ball*'s parent, probably.









Beat 'em ups

Forget *Carmaggedon*, *Doom* and *Soldier of Fortune*, these were the original videogame nasties. Each game encouraged the pummelling of countless enemies with anything from a fist to a small dragon. Yes, there was something uniquely satisfying about defeating hordes of foes, but morally corrupting? How did you turn out?

- **Alien Storm (1990)**
- **Captain Commando (1991)**
- **Double Dragon (1987)**
  Headbutts, uppercuts, back-kicks, elbows and throws, the moves in *Double Dragon* were certainly comprehensive. Taito's scrolling beat 'em up wasn't the first of its kind, but it ruled the genre before something superior came along…
- **Final Fight (1989)**
  Take Cody, Guy or Mayor Haggar on a mission to free Jessica from the grasp of the Mad Gear gang. This is still the daddy of the vigilante brawlers. But the storm over whether Roxy and Poison are bad girls or transvestites still rages.
- **Garou: Mark of the Wolves (1999)**
- **Golden Axe (1989)**
  Charging into camp fantasy characters before finishing them off with a blade was entertaining enough, but the addition of magic and dragon mounts made this a novel addition to the field. An adept and light-hearted take on the genre by Sega.
- **King of the Fighters '94, The (1994)**
  Arguments over SNK's best version of its *King of the Fighters* series will always rage, but this is easily up there in the premier league of beat 'em ups. Superb sprite animation with balance and flair make it an essential MAME title.
- **Knight of the Round (1992)**
- **Kung Fu Master (1984)**
  Catching onto the early wave of David Carradine and Bruce Lee adoration, came *Kung Fu Master*, an elegant game with pixel-perfect collision detection and more enemies than you could shake a staff at. Great bosses and backdrops, too.
- **Mortal Kombat (1992)**
- **Renegade (1986)**
- **Street Fighter II (1991)**
  After the mediocre brawler that was *Street Fighter* no one expected Capcom to deliver a great sequel. But *Street Fighter II* wasn't great, it was Godly. Although it may have been a bug that inspired the combos, we'll still give Capcom credit for designing one of the top ten games of all time.
- **Yie Ar Kung-Fu (1985)**







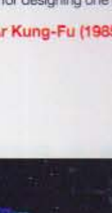








- **Mikie (1984)**
  Headbutting teachers was obviously the way to a woman's heart in Konami's surreal *Mikie*. Collect missives and deliver them to your dream girl while avoiding janitors and football jocks. Odd but engaging.
- **Mr. Do! (1982)**
  'Cute' has become something of a derogatory term over recent years but it was always the word applied to *Mr. Do!* when it first came on the scene in 1982. Fine audio and sound effects, genius level design and, well, it was cute. One of the first MAME titles you should try out.
- **Pac-Man (1980)**
  Pac-Man is a timeless classic. Because the game only required one joystick and no buttons it was accessible to anyone and the abstract gobble-gobble-gobble nature of the gameplay did something really very special: it attracted girls into coin-op centres the world over.
- **Paperboy (1984)**
  The handlebar controller was something of a novelty when *Paperboy* first hit arcade centres. Although the movement of the bike is a bit on the fiddly side, *Paperboy* still retains its charm and will bring back powerful memories for many. The game was so popular that it was converted to just about every format.
- **Rampart (1990)**
  There's nothing more satisfying than building something of your own that you can stand back from and admire. Except demolishing someone else's hard work. Atari combined the two gameplay staples of construction and destruction with a confidence not seen since its heyday.
- **Root Beer Tapper (1984)**
  Perhaps Midway felt that serving booze was a little risqué. Whatever the reason, the sequel to *Tapper* had you dispensing soft drinks to bizarre customers such as aliens, cowgirls and athletes. Delicious twitch gaming.
- **Toobin' (1988)**
  Built at a time when ideas, no matter how left-field, were turned into winning gameplay experiences, *Toobin'* offered players the chance to raft down the Okefenokee river in an innertube. Play it for the party scenes alone.










Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Dungeon Siege

Okay, so it's a pretty standard dungeon crawl adventure, but there's 60 hours of it, with no level demarcations and stats galore. Completely engrossing.



(PC) Microsoft

Neverwinter Nights

BioWare's fabulous creation saves **Edge**'s summer gaming as the consoles headed off to the beach, leaving the PC (and the GC for that matter) at home.



(PC) Infogrames

Grid Runner ++

It is as you'd expect: frustrating, hypnotic, One-More-Go. *Grid Runner* got its shareware release just as **Edge** entered deadline week, and proves destructive.



(PC) http://www.llamasoft.co.uk

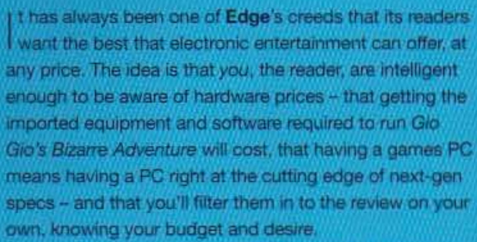
Super Ghouls 'n' Ghosts

One of the few games that remains exactly as you remember it from all those years ago: crushingly difficult, mildly frustrating but still as addictive as hell.



(GBA) Capcom

The price is wrong



Not all games are created equal...

It has always been one of **Edge**'s creeds that its readers want the best that electronic entertainment can offer, at any price. The idea is that *you*, the reader, are intelligent enough to be aware of hardware prices – that getting the imported equipment and software required to run *Glo Gio's Bizarre Adventure* will cost, that having a games PC means having a PC right at the cutting edge of next-gen specs – and that you'll filter them in to the review on your own, knowing your budget and desire.

Of course, you're special, and the rest of the world is somewhat less dedicated, which is why pricing is still an issue that holds videogaming back from reaching its widest audience. When a game as lightweight as *GunGrave* is priced in the same region as something as time-consuming as *Super Mario Sunshine*, browsers may presume they offer roughly the same amount of entertainment. The truth is somewhat different.

Gaming's utterly rigid price structure, where all new console games cost roughly the same, is harming the industry. It is harming the industry because casual browsers can't be sure what's in the DVD box they're buying and because, at over £40 a throw, it's difficult to justify a purchase with a question mark over it. Easier to go for a couple of DVDs with pointless featurettes and unwanted extras. You know exactly what you're getting.

Of course, any kind of playtime measure is impossible, mainly because the length of the experience for product x will fluctuate between gamers of different abilities and predilections, but also because it requires some honesty on the part of games publishers. So does **Edge**'s proposed solution: that games' shelf price should bear some relation to the amount they've cost to develop.

Thus epics like the *Final Fantasy* series justify their price tags by being the equivalent of television series DVD box sets, while shorter works such as *GunGrave* cost somewhere closer to £20. It'd make new games an impulse buy again. It'd bring fresh people into the industry. It would be great for gaming. Of course, it's unlikely to happen anywhere apart from at garage level: Jeff Minter's *Grid Runner ++* is £5 from http://www.llamasoft.co.uk, and **Edge** can't think of a better way for any PC owner, regardless of spec, to spend their time and money.











GunGrave

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Red Entertainment** Price: **¥5,800 (£32)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Winter (UK)**







Gunfire can be locked to a target, allowing players to concentrate their non-stop destruction on a specific area while strafing to avoid enemy fire

As with other recent 3D action-adventure romps, *GunGrave*'s impact is assured by a stylish new twist on shooting everything in sight. And, as with those other other cases – think Dante's aerial displays or Max Payne's theatrically decelerated scum-slaughtering – the thrill of the entire game fades alarmingly as the novelty gunplay loses its appeal. Although it combines a *Max Payne*-like revenge motif with an obsession for baroque rebel-cool kitsch of the *Devil May Cry* variety, *GunGrave* is done and dusted in the time it takes either of those titles to get going.

GunGrave's brevity seems almost certain to be its undoing. The game is the newly-pragmatic Sega's first serious shot at the lucrative action-adventure market that Capcom and co have cornered, but it's all over in six short levels – the old, stubborn Sega thinking of videogame value in terms of short arcade bursts rather than as considered investments for the home.

It's all the more difficult to take because of the fact that, despite a typically dubious plot involving a murdered corporate wage-slave taking revenge on his Chaos-backed bosses and their corporation, *GunGrave* begins like something special. Exquisite anime cut-scenes – all resonant colours and diaphanous delicacy – set the tone, and the opening sections of gameplay seem to make good on their promise. *GunGrave*'s world is a cel-shaded, thirdperson landscape loaded with enemies. The controls are thoroughly simple (one button each for firing, jumping, specials and dashes), movement is analogue-only, and between them they are designed to help the player through what are essentially a series of strung-together set-pieces disguised as stages, avoiding the haphazard fire of waves of enemies and unleashing chains of direct hits in return.

"You will be forgiven for wondering if the entire GunGrave concept isn't just a ruse to salvage cel-shaded environments from THotD3"



It's certainly pretty, the dark take on cel-shading adding atmosphere and individuality. Sadly, once players have finished the game and stopped cooing at the graphical sheen, there's little left to admire



Special attacks – like this one with the rocket launcher – are illustrated with slo-mo effects

An unbroken sequence of hits (to murderous thugs or any number of destructible items of scenery) constitutes a Beat Count, and the potential for racking up enormous combos is one of several neat arcade-style scoring devices intended to extend the game's lifespan. There's a *Halo*-like dual-bar life system and an 'artistic merit' rating which bottoms out the moment continues are reached for and rewards vogueing – aka hero Grave's 'Vanity Pose' – in the heat of battle. These and the other hidden charms it reveals on repeated play might have been enough to compensate for its shortness if the sheer style of the game had been sustained throughout.

Unfortunately, it hasn't. As it is, the game's brilliant collage of every cool near-future dystopia ever seen on a screen fizzles out into generic banality. After later sections in a train and in a banqueting hall which recall nothing so much as the *Virtua Cop* games, the ending descends into a *The House of the Dead* exercise in tacky undead sci-fi. Indeed, by the final battle with an overly familiar and deeply disappointing blue boss, you will be forgiven for wondering whether the entire *GunGrave* concept isn't just an ingenious ruse to salvage cel-shaded environments from the aborted early version of *THotD3*.

GunGrave begins by parading so much invention and careful craft that expecting great things doesn't seem unreasonable. When it ends, the feeling is of regret for what might have been. If Sega is going to cash in on the action-adventure boom, it'll need to go back to the drawing board and revise its bang-for-buck ratios. Meanwhile, even more now rests on *Shinobi*'s shoulders.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Previously in E110, E112





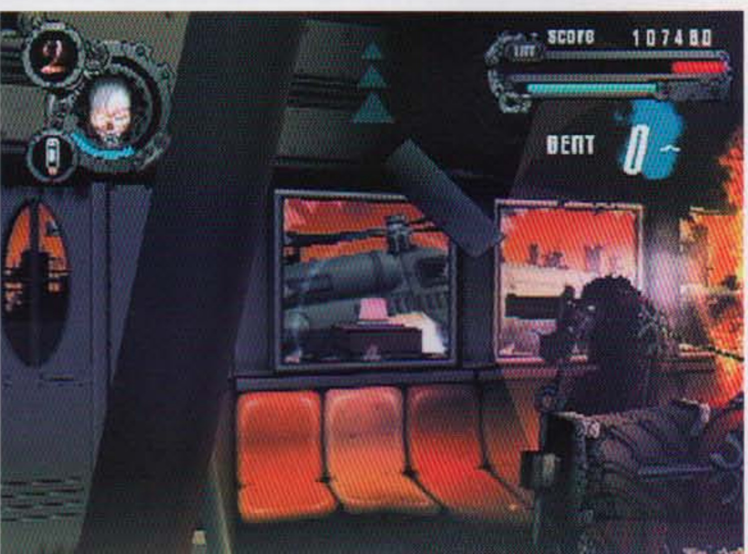




















Almost every object in the background can be attacked and destroyed. While the non-stop bang-bang-crash has a certain sonic and aesthetic appeal, it's hardly worth the entry fee

This set-piece on a bridge has Grave fleeing from an advancing tank while returning fire. Like *Max Payne*, *GunGrave* allows players to pull off spectacular moves with ease, but like *Payne*, it soon loses its appeal

TOCA Race Driver

Format: **PS2 (version tested), PC** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (PS2), Autumn (PC)**





Typically, weather and time of day play a large part. Expect hot midday sun, warm evenings, exciting night races and drizzle to storm conditions

You have to wonder. Anyone with a more cynical outlook on life than **Edge** would. Upon loading up *Race Driver* and settling into the first race, you would wonder why exactly it has taken Codemasters so long to roll this next-gen follow-up to one of the publisher's most successful and consistently strong franchises out of the garage. After all, other than the expected graphical enhancement the series would appear to have only travelled a handful of kilometres since 2000's *TOCA World Touring Cars*, its last outing.

Yes, there is the addition of narrative but, while **Edge** is genuinely pleased and thankful to see someone trying to evolve the racing genre, ultimately this particular attempt is flawed. Sporadic initially, the cut-scenes only really get going once you reach the final stages of the career mode and go on to reveal a disappointingly clichéd, predictable denouement – the opportunity to include a captivating plot has been shockingly missed.

It's still a superior model to that offered by the majority of racing titles, and significantly above average, but it's not the best in the TOCA series

In addition, as pointed out by Steven Poole in Trigger Happy this month (p24), it simply doesn't work – on-track incidents and cut-scenes feel worlds apart and the numerous loading periods, though a technical necessity, tend to destroy the proceedings' fluidity.

At least the actual racing, the game's main concern let's not forget, is far more accomplished. The in-car view, in particular, is fabulous – easily one of the best examples **Edge** has had the pleasure to experience. At times, certainly when taking part in the TOCA rounds (the UK circuits appear better realised than the rest of the admittedly impressive repertoire), it feels like the real thing. It may not look like it (although obviously more accomplished than previous *TOCA* titles, the graphics are still some way off photorealism), but when combined with the game's aural ability the resulting effect can be utterly convincing (see Days of thunder).

Frustratingly, the handling isn't as impressive. While clearly an evolution on what has gone before, not all of the vehicles behave as you'd expect them to. Generally speaking most of the touring cars (and that includes the German DTM, Australian V8 Supercars, etc), although unnecessarily twitchy, feel intuitive and your thumb soon learns how much steering input is allowed before overstepping the mark. It's the more powerful vehicles you come across later on in your career that disappoint the most – some just feel absurd (interestingly, *TOCA2* displayed similar symptoms). **Edge** can't be sure, but it feels as though the handling model has been given a more massmarket treatment since the E3 demo, which although demanding felt especially promising. It's still a superior model to that offered by the majority of racing titles, and significantly above average, but curiously it's not the best in the *TOCA* series.

Similarly, the behaviour of your competitors is erratic with some occasional dubious decisions taken by the other 13 vehicles. They do weave around as you attempt to overtake them and seem aware of your presence on the track but somehow they come across as more lifeless than those of some of the game's predecessors. Other drivers fail to display anything resembling personality which is disappointing considering how persuasive the AI routines (obviously subject to player interpretation) in *World Touring Cars* were.

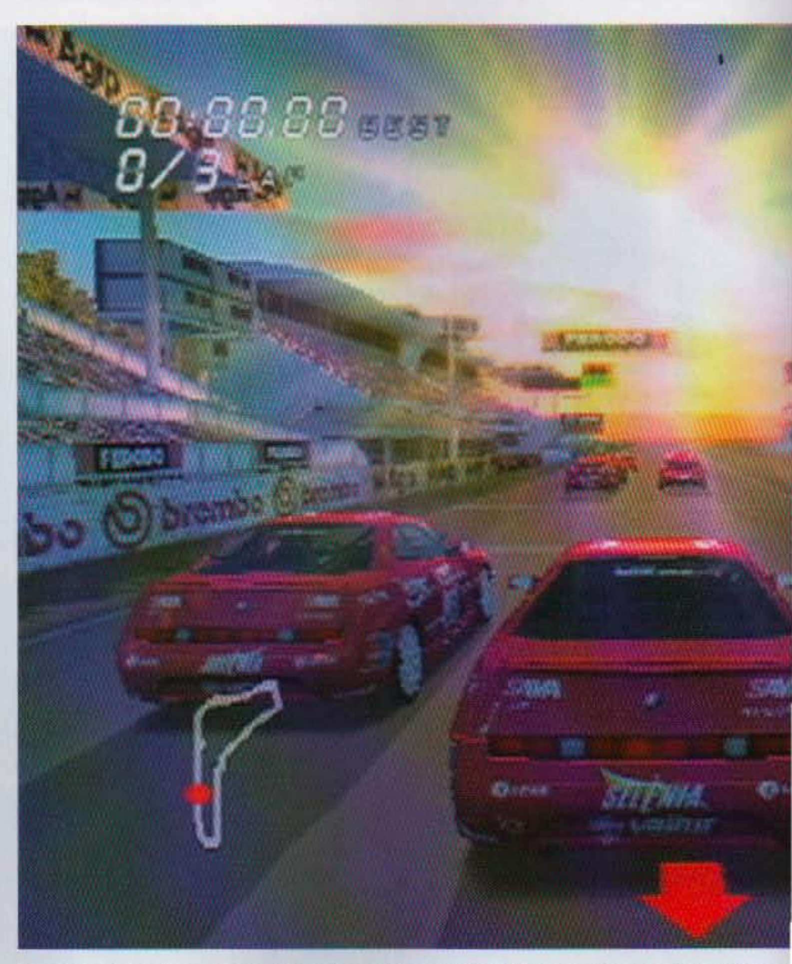
Ultimately, you can't shake the reality that while *Race Driver* can provide some excellent driving moments, it doesn't represent as convincing an evolutionary roll forward as **Edge** had hoped for. *World Touring Cars* delivers a better racing experience and *TOCA2*'s handling remains more engaging. You have to wonder...

Edge rating: Seven out of ter





Care has been taken to include most aspects of a race driver. And the cut-scenes, when they appear, are decent



One of the one-make single races you occasionally get to enter. Career progression is very similar to of *WTC* with the many championships divided across four tiers (an Elite, invitation-only round opens

Previously in E101, E108, E112









One area that has progressed substantially is the game's comprehensive damage model – it's one of the best examples currently around













Racing wise, there is plenty of variety as you progress through the many categories on offer. Occasional pop-up can make judging braking points difficult. Multiplayer options are good and very playable (right)

Days of thunder

The sound quality merits a boxout. In stereo it's clearly superior to the offerings of most other racing games but in surround sound it's quite remarkable. **Edge** has rarely come across a title in this popular genre that conveys the excitement of the very identifiable atmosphere of a racing cockpit as convincingly. If you still dismiss the potential of great sound to utterly enhance the gaming experience, titles such as this (*MoH Frontline* is another example) are more than likely to convert you.

Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Hitmaker** Price: **$50(£33)** Release: **Out now (US), September 20 (UK)** Previously in **E109**

The *Crazy Taxi* formula has lost none of its inherent charm since *Crazy Taxi* or *Crazy Taxi 2*, but this update is a typical story of staid sequelitis. Times move on, but *Crazy Taxi*, it seems, does not. Oh, there's a few more minigames to try out in the enjoyable Crazy X mode and a new city to explore, but on viewing yet another bunch of screenshots displaying a vibrant yellow cab screeching to a halt near some more cartoon hailers you have to raise the obvious question: why?

Let's be frank, *Crazy Taxi* was never a game to warrant hours of diligent play. Initial forays through the streets of San Francisco were a great deal of fun. So much fun that you kept going back for more. For a couple of days. "It's still a great game," you said to yourself, while loading up *Shenmue*, or some other superior Dreamcast title. "I'll go back to *Crazy Taxi* when I've got half an hour to kill." But unless you were a Sega fanboy you never really did. Maybe it came out for a party or two. Maybe you even bought *Crazy Taxi 2*. Disposable fun, and nothing wrong with that. It's just that the emphasis is now firmly on the disposable and less so on the fun.

Here are some harsh facts: if you have either of its predecessors there's really no point in upgrading. And if you've never played a *Crazy Taxi* game before and want to try it on your new Xbox then you can expect some slowdown. Yes, although the new host hardware copes with San Francisco and New York admirably (ported directly from *Crazy Taxi* and *Crazy Taxi 2* respectively), take to Las Vegas and you can expect the occasional choppy framerate. It's certainly not enough to spoil the experience but it's disappointing nevertheless.

But perhaps we've been overly harsh on what can still be an entertaining ride. Extra features include a new improved crazy hop, which combined with the crazy drift, stop and dash manoeuvres help to add another layer of challenge to the experience. And there's plenty of hard-to-reach areas to explore for those with more investigative minds. Indeed, Las Vegas is the most impressive city in the series to date and finding the quickest routes to your destinations is arguably more enjoyable than before.

Crazy Taxi 3 is a blast, just don't expect it to be occupying your Xbox disk drive after the initial excitement has worn off.

Edge rating: Six out of ten











Crazy driving is actively encouraged and you'll earn more money for performing outrageous stunts to impress passengers. The replay mode returns so you can see their reactions close up



Dexterity is required to operate the drive and reverse gears in such a way as to perform the many gravity-defying manoeuvres in the game

Crazy driving school

In keeping with the spirit of the previous games Hitmaker has included a series of very enjoyable minigames. This time, however, the games are structured in an X shape (hence Crazy X mode) and get gradually more difficult as you reach the centre. The games are entertaining in themselves but, due to tough time limits, also operate as useful tutorials for many of the vehicles' drift and boost techniques.



Beach Spikers

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega-AM2** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), September 20 (UK)**

Previously in **E**110, **E**112

Superficially, there is nothing wrong with superficiality – everyone likes to look at pretty things – but when it drives a game's development there's cause for concern. While *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* appears to be a case of gaming concept evolving from aesthetic (and sexual) desire, there is no reason that beach volleyball as a sport shouldn't lend itself well to videogaming. So *Beach Spikers* proves.

It helps to have a grasp of the sport's structure. A high net divides two teams of two players, and each team has three shots between them to send the ball back to their opponents. The first touch of the ball is damage limitation, the second sets up an attack and the third is the spike. This is how the game works: a coloured circle illustrates where shots will land, and in order to keep the rally going, the player must reach the circle before the ball hits the sand. The closer they get to the centre of the circle, the better the shot, and the more potentially powerful the follow-up.

The exception is the spike. Here, the computer automatically races the player to the ball, and the player must concentrate on stopping a power bar at an appropriate point to execute a jumping smash. While they're doing that, the opponents position themselves appropriately, either for a block at the net or to second-guess the direction of the ball. It is a neat and tidy dynamic, which offers little more depth than the process listed above indicates, recognising that any more complexity could prove detrimental. Indeed, where the game shines most is in its fourplayer mode, and the fact that it's so accessible means finding playing partners is easy.

Arcade falls with little trouble at all, even on the hardest difficulty setting. The World Tour mode is a little more substantial, but still fails to provide enough challenge to sustain long-term singleplayer entertainment. The opportunity to encourage or deride your CPU-controlled playing partner during brief breaks in play fails to add depth, and increasing her various abilities by winning and allocating stat points feels like a chore.

In singleplayer, you ache for the joy of multiplayer, and that's the problem. But with friends it is *Virtua Tennis* on holiday, reading an airhead trash novel on a sun-drenched beach. Simply, it is pretty: pretty fun, pretty girls, pretty vacant.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Cut-scenes between points capture the players' joy with well-toned realism, and particularly sharp spikes result in accentuated replays. Post-game, the celebrations are a little more tender, but hardly erotic





While the camera swings all over the court to capture the action, it's rarely disorientating, mostly because there's little else for players to concentrate on while the ball's in play



Mannequin chic

Beach Spikers is beautiful, no question; the arid surroundings are lush, the OTT slow-mo replays impress and the girls, predictably, are gorgeous. But those embarrassed by *Dead or Alive*'s unashamed overtones will be pleased, because it is all benign stuff – no cynical Tecmo ploys, just four lithe, perfect bodies that might as well be plastic for all their asexual rigidity. That's not to say all opportunities for commercialism have been skipped by Sega: each stage is heavily sponsored, but even at its most obvious the advertising is more comical than crass, and easily ignored.

Turok Evolution

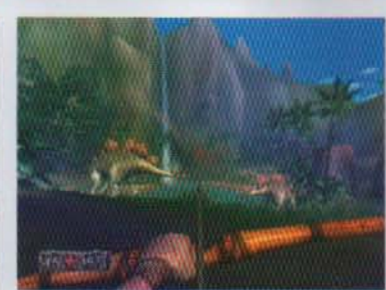
Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Acclaim Studios Austin** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**107, **E**108













Although the crosshair tracking speed can be adjusted, it fails to radically improve targeting. Auto aiming helps, but it's not an ideal solution



The PS2 experience

Predictably the PS2 version (above) has less textural definition and a shorter draw distance than the Xbox build. In terms of level design there's little difference apart from the occasional enemy that's been removed to, presumably, encourage a smoother framerate. It hasn't worked. The PS2 framerate can be choppy and if anything, the enemies are even more erratic. The GameCube build has yet to be submitted at the time of writing.



As in *Halo* you get to fly and shoot as well. Unfortunately, the dinosaur 'vehicles' are not integrated into the fabric of the FPS game and are merely tagged on as pace breakers. It's mildly entertaining though

Yes, a five. **Edge** is as disappointed as you are and it's not with any satisfaction that such a mediocre score is awarded to a game that promised so much. *Turok Evolution* can be stimulating, inventive and fun, but it can also be unforgiving, glitchy and irritating. As if designed by a team that individually jotted down their plans on a strip of paper, covered over the evidence with a fold and then passed it on to the next person, the game shows alarming inconsistency.

Evolution looks like a title rushed out for the pre-Christmas window, with the AI particularly retarded. Characters perform some tasks well, for example enemies run for cover and surrender when threatened, but in other respects the routines lack sophistication and fail to show any contextual sensitivity. Adversaries will walk into their own grenades, run around in circles, and climb up and down ladders like demented steeplejacks. Such behaviour doesn't occur in every encounter but it's prevalent enough to spoil the overall atmosphere.

Targeting is equally bothersome. The controls have been poorly mapped onto the Xbox analogue sticks and there's much more of a 'dead zone' than in *Halo*, for instance. Attempting head shots is harder than it needs to be and making incremental adjustments is maddening due to the lack of sensitivity.

In terms of plot, *Turok Evolution* continues from the previous N64 adventures of Tal'Set, only this time it's your task to travel back in time to defeat the dictator Tyranus and free the River Villagers from his evil influence. Later levels, involving the infiltration of enemy compounds and the destruction of key technology centres, do encourage a thoughtful approach and there's certainly an impulse to delve deeper into the game. The sense that you're getting ever nearer to the source of evil is communicated particularly well and the transition from the primitive to the futuristic is handled adroitly.

There are other neat touches. The flying sections break up the pace and there are some satisfying weapons later in the game. But a level that sees you pelting though corridors only to be pulverised by prescripted explosions is evidence of idiot design best left in another era. In such a crowded genre *Turok Evolution* is too erratic to warrant anything above the ordinary. Another three months in development might have improved things markedly.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2

Format: PS2 (version tested), GC, Xbox, GBA Publisher: Activision Developer: HotGen Studios Price: £40 Release: Out now

Previously in E106, E109

Another *Mat Hoffman* game, another development studio. After Runecraft failed to beat the competition (ie *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX*), it's the turn of HotGen Studios to try out-tricking its main rival, the predictably titled *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2*.

To save some you reading time, it doesn't manage it. But that's not to say it doesn't possess its own strengths. The most apparent has to be its structure: join Hoffman and co on their roadtrip across America and get to visit the same eight locations (within reason, progression is left to the player) the tour did last year, unlocking plenty of real life footage in between the stages. Hardly revolutionary, true, but a welcome touch nonetheless – it makes the experience less artificial and more involving than *Dave Mirra 2*'s.

Another *Hoffman* advantage is the inclusion of flatland moves. Tricky at first but once you've mastered the balance they provide a satisfying alternative to your vert and street antics. And *Hoffman* finally catches up with *Mirra*'s trick-morphing ability, thus vastly increasing the number of moves available (and like Acclaim's title, inevitably allowing some daft variations).

On paper then, everything looks in place but start pedalling and, like *Mirra 2*, a few annoying niggles emerge. The fact that the graphics are again functional rather than impressive isn't a crucial issue and **Edge** is perfectly prepared to ignore the occasional glitch. Slightly more significant are the inconsistencies in pace and momentum – for one, the riders spin too fast which can often make things look unnecessarily frenzied – while the camera feels too close to the action (although admittedly this doesn't seem as pronounced after prolonged play).

By far the biggest culprit, and one that no BMX title has yet vanquished, is the control system. **Edge** realises that translating bike dynamics into a game is a harder task than skateboarding mechanics but this is still a long way behind the *Hawk* games in terms of fluidity. It still feels overly clumsy and can occasionally prove frustrating.

As with previous bike titles, persevere and eventually you get some reward. However, the overall lack of finesse is beginning to grate. Perhaps the next instalments from Acclaim and Activision can remedy matters.

Edge rating: Six out of ten











As ever, expect amateur, semi-pro and pro challenges to open up in succession and access to other levels is achieved via their completion. In addition, the multiplayer modes are fun and there's also a level editor



The camera is manipulated with the right analogue stick and can be locked in place by pressing R3. It does feel overly close to the action at first but you eventually get used to it

Mafia: City of Lost Heaven

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **Illusion Softworks** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E90**









While the driving elements take up the most time, they are unsatisfactory compared to the more action-influenced sections



Garage rock

Mafia's approach to car theft is more sedate and structured than the grab-a-car-any-car approach that distinguished Rockstar's evil child. To steal a car you have to know how to opens its lock, which is taught by a stuttering mechanic as you progress through the game. Upon stealing one, it's placed in a garage and made available for future missions. Car fanatics will be especially fond of wandering beside row-upon-row of glistening chromed beasts.







While the scenery itself can often appear somewhat flat, the actual car models have been lovingly rendered (left). The airport level is one of the more expansive set-pieces in the game (right)

While it's undeniable that the Mafia live large in the shared public imagination, you have to wonder at the wisdom of a publisher – and labels apart, it *is* the same publisher – releasing two games dealing with the machinations of urban organised crime, and dealing with it in what seems, on a superficial level at least, to be an extremely similar manner. With *Grand Theft Auto III* still setting sales records, why publish *Mafia*?

First, it's a PC lead game, and with the botched conversion in technical terms – framerate problems abound on some computers, taking the halo off the genuine improvements in the combat system – there's certainly room for a *GTAIII*-style game on the PC. In terms of aesthetics, it doesn't fail. Period music. Talented voice-acting. Some of the best realtime model cut-scenes yet seen on the form. Use of the latest 3D card's power. A less arcade and more simulator-based emphasis. It's all there. Well, bar quicksaves, which are sure to enrage some of the hardcore of the format, but an autosave system at well-chosen checkpoints in the manner of *Halo* should pacify all but the most fanatical.

Second, at its core it's not really that similar to *GTAIII*. While the moderately branched narrative process was the driving force throughout, it was really a systematic game reliant on a standardised ruleset in a general, open playfield, in love with the possibilities of emergence. *Mafia*, while featuring a living city, is a game far more about the scripting of individual encounters. The driving about the city is a minor element compared to the importance of the individual battles centred in areas constructed specially for the mission. Due to the more realistic driving system – and period-appropriate cars, many with limited performance – players will find themselves less likely to recreate the most hyperbolic automobile chases of film history and more likely to mirror-signal-manoeuvre and keep to the speed limit.

Ultimately, this leads to a deeply episodic feel for the game proper. On the positive side, you end up with a game where you're constantly surprised by what challenge you're presented with next. On the negative, none of the individual sections is as developed as **Edge** would have hoped. Despite this, *Mafia* makes a brave stab at an epic sweep – but like many epics, mistakes size and expanse for worthiness.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Conflict: Desert Storm

Format: **Xbox (reviewed), PC, PS2** Publisher: **SCi** Developer: **Pivotal Games** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**103, **E**113

World War II titles often seem preoccupied with recreating set-pieces of gory, eviscerating, grit-spattered glory at the expense of freedom. *Conflict: Desert Storm* however, a game based on the opening acts of the Gulf War, seeks to inject some of the more thoughtful elements of combat usually associated with the 'Terrorism 101' courses offered by Tom Clancy titles.

And for the most part it succeeds in providing the player with a palatable mix of tactics and gunplay. It's military kindergarten stuff, providing a thorough grounding in the basics: covering angles, assessing and utilising strengths of your team in synergy – don't aim for the head when using an automatic rifle, level your sights on the midriff, and let the kickback trace a series of bloody buttonholes up the chest; certain weapons can only be used while stationary, and so on. And that's how deep the strategy runs. Beyond this, it could almost be billed as a third/firstperson shooter where the opposition rarely comes within point blank proximity. Anyone comfortable with the thesis of pre-mission briefings, blueprints and documents that titles such as *Ghost Recon* involve may feel patronised by the lack of rigour.

During segments of certain missions, a stream of enemies will constantly spawn until you pass an invisible waypoint, which is a good indicator of how basic and accessible the level of action the game tries to engender, especially during later missions. Your main task is gaining the ground, edging your squad forward one-by-one, while still offering each other adequate protection. Completing mission objectives is a triviality, as they centre on eliminating a cache of enemy forces, or infiltrating an occupied zone.

The most jarring part of the experience isn't how economical with reality the developer has been in terms of setting, but the typically disabled behaviour of the enemy soldiers, who come across as blind and deaf to whatever rowdy warfare is going on just around the corner from them. This is the major ruination of the coherence of the experience, not the primitive visuals or the lack of military fetishism.

The squad's AI, though unsophisticated, works solidly. And next to the idiot-savant behaviour of most videogame team mates, it's a virtue. *Desert Storm* is a successful, if rudimentary, blend of considerate manoeuvres and auto-aiming action.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









You have two save games per mission, which makes for a pleasing balance between cutthroat checkpoints and tension-free quick saving. Up to three other players can join up at any time



Issuing commands is simple, requiring single button presses in conjunction with the left trigger. Next to its PC brethren *Conflict* may feel too much like a Fisher Price combat sim but that's presumably the point

Sarge's heroes

Your squad is composed of four members, each with a specialised inventory – scout, sniper, heavy weapons and explosives. It's not until they've got some significant combat experience under their belt utilising their respective favourite weapons that you'll notice differences in skill. The sniper, for example, draws his target with practised speed and precision after several missions and promotions. If you lose a colleague in combat – although you've three minutes to rescue them with a medkit once they fall in battle – they'll be replaced in the next mission by a nascent rookie.

Murakumo

Format: Xbox Publisher: From Software Developer: In-house Price: ¥6,800 (£37) Release: Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)








Handling feels awkward and the target-tracking system isn't what it should be. Crucial flaws for a game that has to rely heavily on such elements

Making the grade

As with any self-respecting arcade shooter, progress through each of *Murakumo's* levels is rewarded with a grade, with 'SS' representing the optimum performance. In the interest of presenting a comprehensive and fair review, **Edge** would dearly love to reveal the lower end of the scale, but apparently it's a feat in itself to complete any mission with anything less than an 'A' ranking. Certainly, **Edge** didn't manage to do so, despite sustained and involved play. Not necessarily a major flaw, but it does rather pose the question; why bother with a ranking system in the first place?



While everything shown pre-release pointed to an experience capable of taking on the *Armored Core* series, the reality is somewhat less exciting. There's some fun to be had but it's short-lived, average stuff

From Software was undoubtedly high on Microsoft's ideal list of potential Japanese Xbox publishers. As **Edge** goes to press, it's too early to tell whether *Murakumo* can match the *Armored Core* series in shifting massive numbers of consoles, but if Microsoft was banking on a game that's quite so distinguished, there are probably one or two disappointed faces in Redmond. Unlike the *Armored Core* series, which is characterised by a fine blend of considered strategy and thirdperson action, *Murakumo* is an outright arcade shoot 'em up. And though it bears all the production values of the *Armored Core* games – lavish movies, mediocre plot, etc. – it's just not as satisfying.

In many ways, the game's like an old skool 2D shooter writ large for the 3D era; the forward momentum is unceasing, the pyrotechnics are exquisite, and the routes of attack waves can be learned by rote to make progression a little bit easier. Choosing one of five 'A.R.K.s' (big robots), each with their own payloads and handling characteristics, players must navigate 17 basic missions before unlocking a handful of expert levels. The structure is the same throughout; pursue a speeding opponent and take them out.

Although the game is visually impressive, and does contain its share of visceral thrills, there are too many flaws for it to live up to the adrenaline-burst gameplay of its spiritual predecessors. The target-tracking system doesn't quite work for example, and the unceasing forward movement causes problems if you hit an obstacle. Equally significant is the clunky handling – which is surprising given the high-octane chase dynamic that runs throughout the game, but also incredibly irritating.

And it's also surprisingly short-lived. While this isn't necessarily a shortcoming, the vast majority of the game is just incredibly easy – most levels will be completed on the first attempt – but a handful of levels are exceedingly frustrating. Without these levels, the whole thing would be over in a couple of hours, but by forcing players to repeat several levels over and over again, the developer has managed to stretch out the experience to three or four times that. So not only is it short it also feels stretched out. Indeed, while there are several mechs to try out, there's not enough satisfaction to be gained to merit completing the game with each – which is evidence of an average experience.

Edge rating: Five out of te

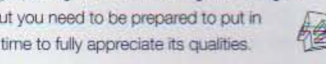
Riding Spirits

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment** Developer: **Spike** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**107, **E**114

Riding Spirits announces its passion for biking from the offset much in the same way every *Gran Turismo* title declares its love for automobiles. This is particularly appropriate given that the game has often been described as the *GT* of the bike world. And in terms of content (the stage is shared by commercial and pro circuit bikes), attention to detail and structure the comparison is valid. However, it's also a far less forgiving, and so less accessible, environment – the handling is more than capable of alienating all but the most dedicated bikehead. Yet it's worth persevering as *Riding Spirits* can be as rewarding as it is demanding.

Less satisfying though, is the mediocre intelligence of the opposition, the angular visuals, some odd collision detection and, most crucially, the lack of independent front/rear braking (one of *MotoGP: URT*'s master strokes) which forces a level of riding precision many will find overly capricious. Then again as in Climax's excellent racer the option to control the rider independently from the bike helps matters significantly.

Riding Spirits gets much more right than it gets wrong. But you need to be prepared to put in the track time to fully appreciate its qualities.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten









There's a comprehensive selection of bikes, a good sense of speed and on some courses the changes in elevation are wonderfully conveyed. The way the auto gearbox can be overriden at any point is a great touch. In-game it's a little difficult to distinguish your bike engine from that of the competition's. A hard game but worth the effort. Owners of widescreen televisions should appreciate the game's 16:9 mode

Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



Fans will be delighted at the way plenty of new characters are introduced, and cut-scenes remain remarkably faithful to the game's manga inspiration. But the lack of a multiplayer mode, and the contrived set-piece nature of many of the levels conspire to undermine the utter magnificence of the characterisation and cel-shaded aesthetic







Despite the large number of sophisticated and complex beat 'em ups there's still a fairly undignified minority that can be completed by the repeated use of just a single button. The last one **Edge** reviewed was *Kabuki Warriors* (1/10, **E**107). Strictly speaking, *Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure* isn't just a beat 'em up, so a similarly monodynamic outlook isn't quite so detrimental, but hopefully you get the point.

It's a shame, though, that while Capcom has clearly put considerable effort into producing a videogame conversion that does justice to the vibrant aesthetic and tortuously complicated politics of the original manga series, this isn't matched by a similar attention to the mechanics of play. *Gio Gio's* is evidently a labour of love, rewarding fans of the manga with a remarkable degree of authenticity, and a host of level secrets that require knowledge of intricate plot details.

But while the lame 3D beat 'em up at the heart of the game is elevated by design inspired by traditional boss encounters, some brilliant ideas are let down by inadequate execution and an obfuscatory camera. On top of which, it's also fairly short, despite additional modes and plenty of extras to unlock.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, GC, PC** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **Black Box (PS2 version)** Price: **£40** Release: **October 25**

Previously in **E**114







One of the game's more interesting elements is the ability to defect over to the law-enforcing side and chase racers around the tracks. In twoplayer mode this can be particularly rewarding. A good sense of speed and EA's usual high standard of presentation complete the experience



The first *NfS* title **Edge** has bothered to play extensively since the original 3DO version, *Hot Pursuit 2* again continues the series' love affair with automotive erotica. Ferrari, Lamborghini and McLaren, among others, offer examples from their aspirational range, though predictably you have to work a little before you can get your feet on that particular selection of drilled pedals. The variety of game modes, however, ensures this doesn't feel like a chore (furthermore, all events reward you with new cars and tracks so there's no reason why you should feel under pressure to stick to one particular mode). And the handling, though clearly massmarket friendly, is perfectly adequate.

On the track, course design may not reveal itself as exemplary but it does encourage x button abuse, much to the delight of the local police force. Officers do anything to stop you (and your fellow competitors) resulting in occasional moments of exhilaration. Like your CPU opponents, they seem more intelligent than in recent *NfS* games, though a certain amount of artificiality is still evident.

Expect a reasonable amount of fun, then. But this is still not as good as the 1994 original.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Eggo Mania

Format: **GBA (version tested), GC, PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Big Ben Interactive** Developer: **HotGen Studios** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Puzzle games can usually be judged on the number of buttons they ask the player to use alone. D-pad aside, all the greats, *Tetris*, *Puyo Puyo*, *Mr Driller* only require one. *Eggo Mania* requires three and the rather fiddly control scheme prevents the game from being as 'pure' as its brethren.

The premise is simple enough, build a wall faster than the rival at the other side of the divide. Bricks fall downwards and you must move Eggo (or one of his chums) to catch it and then press a button to slam it down into place. Inspired by *Tetris*, solid wall-building is rewarded with higher point-scoring and stable foundations (the wall is likely to crumble if too many gaps are left). Bricks can also be rotated and discarded should the player wish.

There are plenty of power-ups and weapons, such as lightning bolts and bombs to throw over at your friend or CPU opponent, yet even with novel extras such as Survival and Bomb modes, *Eggo Mania* is just slightly too elaborate for its own good. Fun for a few days, unfortunately, *Eggo Mania* doesn't have either the compulsive qualities of *Tetris* or the cerebral challenge of *Puyo Puyo*.



Edge rating: Five out of ten











Backgrounds are vibrant and colourful but have no impact on gameplay. Creatures, such as parrots, will swoop down to steal the pieces your character is holding. This becomes mildly irritating after a while

The making of…

EverQuest

The largest firstperson virtual universe ever created, EverQuest has over 100 million square feet of virtual real estate, in which more than 400,000 players make a living in the 27th strongest economy in the world…

Original format: **PC**
Publisher: **Sony Online Entertainment**
Developer: **Verant Interactive**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1999**

It was a wedding that first blew them away. They watched characters exchange rings and vows, in a world they had made, and it was nothing they could have predicted. "There was a GM," remembers **John Smedley**, the original producer of *EverQuest*, "me, **Brad McQuaid**... and we saw a wedding in the game. It was awesome."

There had been online worlds before. The Multi-User Dungeons common on '80s university campuses were a big inspiration to the project team, and *Ultima Online* went beta eight months into the *EverQuest* development phase; but *EQ* was the first to hit upon that elusive alchemy that turns a game into media gold. The first massively-multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) to offer a firstperson perspective, *EverQuest* was also by far the largest. 'Norrath', as

The graphics in *EQ* are not afraid to cater to the more lurid tastes of fantasy fan-dom. Newly created wood-elves are particularly naked, a fact which has lead to the nickname 'EverChest'







Steve Clover, co-creator and lead programer, christened the *EQ* universe, now stands at millions of square feet of virtual real estate, with an Ebay exchange rate of 75 platinum pieces to the US dollar, and, according to one economist, a per-capita GNP of $2,266 – greater than that of China. At the start of development, though, the project team had no idea their creation was to become such a phenomenon.

Clover and McQuaid had been working as database programmers, developing a singleplayer RPG together in their spare time. The few offers they had fell through, so they posted the demo on the Internet. John Smedley saw the demo, and offered them a job. "As much as we loved database programming," says Clover, "we jumped at the chance."

As **Bill Trost**, senior game designer, remembers, the team's saving grace was that they had no idea what they were letting themselves in for. "When I joined the project, *EQ* was just an idea. They wanted to create a graphical MUD, and had some idea about how it would look, but not many specifics. We had lofty goals but we were lucky: we were too young and too new to realise how difficult it would be."

Steve Clover created the original map of Norrath, inventing the city names – including the branded capital, Qeynos (SonyEQ spelt backwards) and, with Brad McQuiad, wrote the main design document. They sketched three continents, accessible by boat, where players could fight, loot, barter and even learn a trade. "No one had ever made zones of that scale in a 3D game before," says **Scott McDaniel**, *EQ*'s art director. "We didn't know what the impact of open geometry or 10,000 in-frustum polygons would be. The programming and art teams got together, and through sheer trial and error we banged out a system that was robust enough to take dozens of players in a zone, but still allowed the freedom to create very different landscapes."

Their offices in San Diego (Clover still brags that he can "go surfing and skiing in the same day without driving too far.") were the perfect muse for Norrath's varied terrain. And the eventual population explosion that made the *EverQuest* phenomenon unique was mirrored in the early days too, by the way their staff quickly ballooned within their small office. "Early on," McDaniel remembers, "there were maybe 14 people attached to the project. All seven of the artists shared one cube in the old SCEA building. It was... a bonding experience."

Smooth development

Smedley remembers the whole development process as long, but "amazingly smooth." He believes *EverQuest* was closer to the original design document than any other game he's seen. The development process was further eased by their decision to keep the NPC AI as simple as possible. "With a massively multiplayer game," says Clover, "you need to be able to handle AI for hundreds of entities at once, so we needed as many shortcuts as possible – much more so than a singleplayer game, which can get away with just processing AI for entities that are close to the player."

EverQuest's development was originally slated for a year, but at the end of that period all the team had was a working demo. Yet all the elements that made the game (dubbed 'EverCrack' for its addictive qualities) so compulsive, were already in place. "The first time we showed *EQ* at E3," Clover remembers, "we had some computers hooked up to our server, which allowed the public to sit down and play for a few minutes – and we had a really hard time getting people to stop playing. We saw more



than a few people spend the better part of the day at our booth. That was when we started to see we might have a hit on our hands."

Once they knew the game was going to be fun, the biggest anxieties were about the hardware. Each of the 40 *EQ* worlds now takes over 20 high-end dual-processor machines to run. "The server architecture is modular," says McQuaid, "with zones running on multiple machines. So as we expand the world, we just add more 'zone servers.'" The client-side technology was more of a worry. "This was back when we were developing a software renderer, and using Pentium 133s to develop the client. We were worried about framerate. What might happen if a bunch of players appeared onscreen at once? But we couldn't stop an army of players from assembling; nor did we really want to. So we designed the game for a maximum group size of six, made some character optimisations – for example, dynamic level of detail on character models — and hoped for the best. It turns out that we can display many more players than we'd ever have hoped."

As Clover remembers, "One of the biggest decisions was whether we should support software rendering, or go hardware only. To put things in perspective, there were absolutely no 3D video cards available at the time, but this company called 3dfx came down to talk to us







about the card they were working on, the original Voodoo, and how we needed to support it. Well, we took a chance, and it was one of the best decisions we ever made."

Over time the design of the world has shifted from traditional fantasy scenery to something more unique to *EQ*. "Visually, the tone was set by my predecessor Rosie Cosgrove," remembers McDaniel. "She took a painterly approach to the game and had the character designers concentrate on tried and true beasties for the players to interact with: orcs, dragons, fairies, etc. When Rosie left we began introducing our own designs for monsters. Now we have a huge library of creatures that people are familiar with as well as things they have never seen before."

It's the scale of the game that makes it stand out. McDaniel calls Norrath 'Leviathan', "We shipped with 78 zones. Half of those were outdoors and averaged 3,000 by 3,000 feet across. Then came the Kunark expansion which had zones that averaged 8,000 by 8,000 feet." Five years and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of revenue later, a team of 43 developers, supported by over 100 customer service staff, continues to expand the game. It's a full-time job. The game area is now more than twice the size it was at launch. At peak times, the *EQ* servers exceed 1Gb per second of bandwidth; subscribers now top 430,000. "You're in our world now," is the game's tag-line, and they mean it. "None of our games is about playing for an hour and being done," says McDaniel. The average uptime is over 20 hours per week.

Discovery channel

So is there anything all these people haven't yet discovered? "*EQ* is huge," says Clover, "so there is certainly stuff that is undiscovered... some have even 'discovered' things that don't really exist, such as the UFOs in the skies over Oasis." **Edge** can, though, exclusively reveal a couple of features for those hardened *EQ* players desperate for an advantage. That Fiery Staff of Ro you've heard hushed rumours about? Well, according to a secret source, the staff can "harness the power of fire to burn enemies like the sun itself." You know you want it. Where is it? Well, **Edge** is keeping shtum, although here's a clue: it's not the Plane of Water. (Oh, and the Orb of Eternal Shadow? It's in Vex Thal.)

EverQuest is not without its faults. The game's extensive and sometimes repetitive combat system has been nicknamed "the *EQ* treadmill," and every time changes to spell and item stats shift the balance of the game, an outcry goes up across a hundred bulletin boards. Ultimately, though, according to McQuaid, the project team sees such feedback as priceless. "And while some of the criticisms take the form of flames and can be hurtful," he says, "I think the majority of it is very healthy. Developers need to continue to interact with their player base and to listen." Trost thinks the experience can only get better. "The more people play these types of games, the more variety we will see in the types of experiences they offer. I really believe that the variety and quality of content offered in MMORPGs will soon rival that currently being offered on cable TV. I think Sony Online Entertainment is in a good position to become the HBO of the Internet."

That, or the official elf registry office. Either way, we're going to be in their world for quite some time to come.

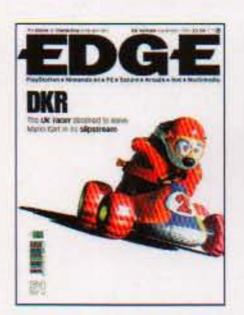


RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 51, November 1997

There's a fine line between PR and desperation. "Many gamers still maintain that *Sega Rally* is the best game ever," said Sega's UK marketing director. "We'll not dispute that!" Well, you wouldn't, particularly in an **Edge** article looking at its hardware's increasingly niche status. The pentagram-branded article was called 'The Cult of Saturn', presumably alluding to the devotion of the Sega hardcore, but prompting thoughts of a diminishing encampment of devotees all holding hands, drinking Sonic-branded Kool-aid, and waiting for that Dural comet to take them to a better place.

Burning Rangers proved a little more uplifting for the faithful, but the testscreen section was dominated by PlayStation games. *FFVII*'s western appearance impressed **Edge** with its scale, and gamers curious about *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* were told they'd "relish its classical sensibilities." PC games also did well: *Hexen II* and *Dark Reign* received 8/10 reviews, while the Saturn's only representative was a port of *Duke Nukem 3D*. Still, it wasn't bad: "A near essential purchase," enthused **Edge**. Well, that's it. With that and *Sega Rally*, how could the Saturn fail?



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Sega was number one in the market with the Mega Drive, and it will be again in the future – there is no doubt about that" – Jo Bladen, Sega's UK marketing director, on the Saturn's prospects.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

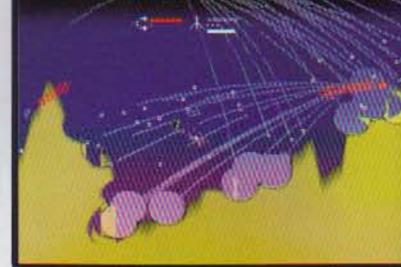
"Who'd buy Shergar's offspring, which might have been mothered by any old nag, when the stud itself could be purchased?" **Edge** discusses the ethics of selective breeding in Cyberlife's *Creatures*.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Final Fantasy VII (PS, 8/10); *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PS, 8/10); *Rapid Racer* (PS, 6/10); *Hexen II* (PC, 8/10); *G-Police* (PS, 8/10); *Dark Reign* (PC, 8/10); *Shadow Warrior* (PC, 6/10); *Nuclear Strike* (PS, 6/10); *Rockman X4* (PS, 6/10); *Duke Nukem* (Saturn, 8/10)



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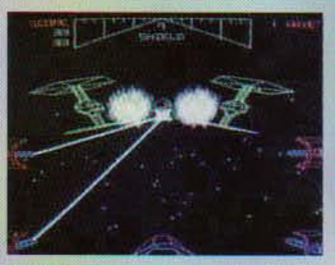
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1. Fin Fin, half dolphin, half bird, all "totally useless exercise in artificial life" 2. *Death Tank*, free with Saturn *Duke Nukem* 3. Skullo and Ken pick up chicks at JAMMA 4. The Super Furry Animals play it cool in *Actua Soccer* 5. *Final Fantasy VII*: "bursting with outrageous effects" 6. The layout for **Edge**'s ode to the Saturn, featuring a huge upside-down pentagram

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Nigel Collier, development director at Lost Boys Games, remembers using the force





Licensed games are destroying the industry? "Pah," says Nigel Collier, *Star Wars* is "*the* game."

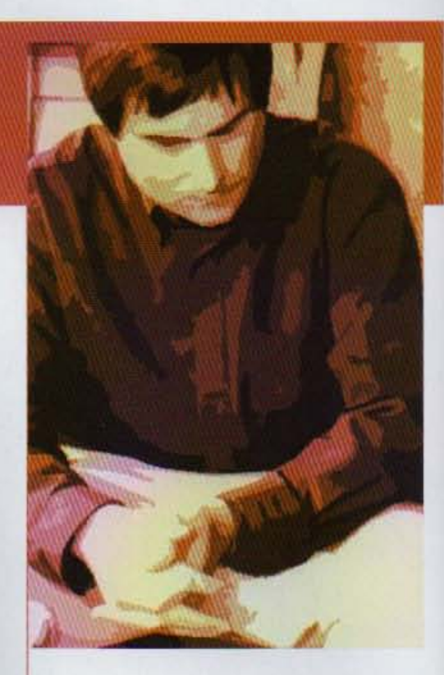
A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away… I used to play a game. *The* game. When I sat down to write this, all my favourites flashed through my mind; *Elite* (C64), *1942* (Arcade), *Leader Board* (C64), *Tetris* (GB), *X-Men* (Arcade) and *Paradroid* (C64). However, one game provided the ultimate gaming experience for its time. It had stunning 3D vector graphics, great gameplay, total immersion, a great story, a soundtrack that sent adrenaline coursing through your body, surround sound audio, speech samples from the film, a wonderful controller and to cap it all… you had to climb inside a huge cockpit to fly an X-wing fighter. All this for only ten pence and nearly 20 years ago too. That's *20* years ago. As a young boy, there was only one game for me. *Star Wars*.

The money went in. The game started. I was now in the 'Star Wars' universe, literally, surrounded by screaming T.I.E Fighters as they moved into attack formations. I took out both the T.I.E Fighters and the shots to protect my shields. Then Darth Vader's fighter appeared. How cool. I got to take out the big man. After knocking out the tower tops and flying through the trenches, I launched a proton torpedo down the exhaust port and blew up the Death Star.

That was a game. As a boy, I felt like the force was with me when I played *Star Wars*.

FAQ

David Braben
director, Frontier Developments



Unless you're a new videogamer, Braben should need no introduction. Okay, then. His studio is currently working on three multiplatform titles. And he's responsible for *Elite*.

What was the first videogame you played?
The original *Space Invaders* in a cabinet in a pub. I remember there was a queue of perhaps 20 people waiting to play this strange fruit machine-style thing. It looked fun and I was surprised there was no sort of pay-out. I suppose that was my initial expectation as it was in a fruit machine-style cabinet. It was quite a short go, but strangely compelling.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
An Acorn Atom. At the time the Atari console was very popular, but my fascination even then was not with playing the games but with how they were made, and you couldn't program the Atari console. I remember the Sinclair ZX80 was advertised in several magazines, but when I saw one, it looked so cheap and nasty I thought it wouldn't last five minutes.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I typed in a few programs from the programming guide that came with the Atom: 'Atomic Theory and Practice' by David Johnson-Davies and learned a great deal by heavily modifying them. In those days (cue sound of Hovis music, sepia tones, etc) books were not ashamed to start teaching assembler programming by about page 50 – that's how it felt, anyway – and it was a great way to learn.

"Some people might describe their games as art, but in my opinion this is a sign that such a game is lacking in other places"

The first game I created from scratch was called *Nuclear War*. It was a twoplayer game – like two games of *Missile Command* side-by-side, except the incoming missiles were fired by the other guy, and the winner was the first to destroy all of the other guy's cities.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
My first 'job' I suppose, was in co-writing *Elite*, though this was unpaid up to the point the game was nearly finished, and we showed publishers. I had approached Acornsoft with the games I had already written, but their interest by this point had moved off the Acorn Atom, on to the just-released BBC Micro.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Defender – the arcade version. It had that elusive 'feel' and it was satisfying to play. I think there is an element of nostalgia to me, too.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
I dip into lots of games. Perhaps the last game I really enjoyed was *Halo* – some of the sneak around sections with the sniper rifle worked very well, but overall the game lacked the go-anywhere feel that was originally touted – it felt very railroaded. The last game I played for more than an hour or so was *Luigi's Mansion*. Although it was a fun idea at first I was quite disappointed by it; it felt repetitious, and too easy to put down.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Defender. I had a chat a few years ago with Eugene Jarvis, who wrote the original *Defender* for Williams. The enthusiasm with which he described the bizarre experimentation process used to produce the sound effects for *Defender* was an amazing throwback to the early days of gaming – and the time where the programmer was expected to do pretty well everything.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
Genuine two-way speech. This unlocks a whole area of unexplored game design ideas.

What disappoints you about the industry?
The 'me too' nature of the industry, and the risk-averse publishing strategies. This ends up with too many games feeling very similar.

Whose work do you most admire?
Miyamoto, I think. He does very well in coming up with a consistent 'whole' game. I realise these days he is managing big teams, but he has managed to keep large projects to a consistent vision, which can be a difficult thing to maintain.

What current gaming platform are you most satisfied with?
PS2. Because of its huge success, more 'niche' games are starting to be developed, and I think this is a very positive thing. The machine itself is often criticised as being the least capable of the current consoles, and though this is true to some extent, it still has unexplored potential (partly because it is less straightforward to develop for).

Do you have any thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
It's a great idea, but currently it's a mess. Until a more unified system of getting the games, paying for the games and controlling the games on the keypad is in place, they will remain one-offs. In 1996 we were involved with a consortium of phone manufacturers in trying to establish such processes, but it went nowhere.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
Both. Clearly. Most things (even half a cow) can be considered art – it just doesn't mean it's good art. Some people might describe their games as art, but in my opinion this is a sign that such a game is lacking in other places. Frankly, a game has to be artistically appealing in some way (even the less-is-more appeal of say, *Vib Ribbon*) to draw me in. I am wary if this 'art' is all there is – more often than not if a film is described as 'arty' then this is meant as a criticism, not as praise.

The 'or' in your question is the nub of the issue. If a game is not entertaining, then it is a failure. The art itself is part of that entertainment. So I think both have to apply.

What pleases/disappoints you about the way videogames are discussed in both the specialist and mainstream press?
Most magazines (other than **Edge**) have little if any, discussion of the reasoning behind why a certain game was developed and why particular design choices were made – interviews with publishers, developers and so on. Those same mags often complain about the samey nature of games and the dominance of sequels. In my experience, most people have strong opinions about which games have the best controls, puzzles, etc, so I think this is of wider interest, but would also start to draw attention more towards games that provide a fresh approach.



Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Paul Ibbotson, E114, got me thinking. In fact that was the essence of his letter. Not enough games are designed today with the intention of giving the player a truly cerebral experience. I'm sure that many designers and programmers are intelligent members of our world, so why isn't this more frequently reflected in their products? Many games have excellent central ideas, but the execution of those ideas then results in a fairly (mentally) unrewarding and plodding experience.

One can't help but wonder whether this may have ramifications on another discussion that has been appearing in **Edge** for the last couple of months, that of aging gamers no longer finding 'that special experience', or 'wow factor' that they once did. Surely part of the reason for this is not simply that games are becoming less imaginative, but that we have matured and now expect more from a gaming experience.

If games are to become a greater part of our culture, then there must be an evolutionary jump forward in their design and execution to acknowledge a shifting user base. As a 32-year-old, I still enjoy a fair amount of shooting, dodging, puzzling, etc. But I'm no longer sure that's enough for my generation. As Paul implied, one is often the subject of derision and misunderstanding from one's peers who perceive games as a waste of time. Now let's imagine a future where instead of derision, one can saunter into work and at coffee, casually let slip that you completed the latest stage in game *X* and your peers sit back, quietly humbled; kudos! Kudos because they know how hard *X* is, because they are all playing *X*, because they haven't yet crystallised the solution and they know that to have done so, you have had an inspired moment.

The kind of games I'm talking about would not necessarily be aimed at the youth market, but instead at the increasing number of parents and career workers who earn a decent income, know most film plots inside out and prefer an interactive challenge in the evening, rather than vegetating while watching banal soap operas. Give us a challenge, make us think, mix in complex problems with adrenaline, education with adventure. Give us a reason to keep playing.
Dr Barry Gibb

It is a somewhat ironic and depressing reality that, generally speaking, publishers continue to ignore the audience that videogaming captivated in its infancy, preferring instead to focus on newer generations whom they feel represent the most lucrative market. Hopefully as developers mature, games will do so alongside (think *Rez* or *Ico*) but these games will continue to be the exception – we're all likely to still be shooting, dodging and puzzling for some time to come.

What makes the perfect games such as *Mario 64* and *Ocarina of Time*? Simple, it is the pure fact that you feel as though you have total control, what you want to do happens. This is nothing to do with the controller or realism. In *Mario* and *Zelda* (even *GoldenEye*) the character felt like an extension of your own hand so the gameplay was constricted by your own abilities and not by the turning circle of your car or jet ski or how fast it is. Or if the character is a fat bastard who has weight but the turning circle of a humpback whale.

If you ever player *Starfighter 3000* on the Acorn you would see that what made it such a great game was that there was complete freedom. For instance, climbing into the atmospere and dive-bombing a target with lasers and missile turrets firing at you with other fighters on your tail, pulling up at the last second (because you know you could) swerving to avoid more missiles, flying lower and scraping mountains to get the fighters off your tail. *Star-X* is a poor attempt at a remake of this game. A direct port, similar to that of GBA *Elite* would have been much better. *Elite* another great game on the Acorn, note total freedom and control.

I have never played it but i am sure that *Halo* is the same from reports that your weapon is an extension of your own hand, this makes games far more enjoyable and gives a far longer lifespan – I still find myself booting up the Acorn for a couple of hours of trashing intergalactic TV stations in *Starfighter* or trading narcotics in *Elite*. I'm only 16 and have been playing these games for seven years, and very few modern games top the pure enjoyment factor. So go ahead, remember the rush. Get 120 stars for the seventh time. Show Alec Trevelyan who's boss. Take a leisurely glide over the Grand Canyon.

Have uninhibited fun, if the new games are not up to it then some of the old ones certainly are. And developers, help bring the good oldies to the younger generations, don't let them miss out, they're still better than half your games.
Andrew King

I see that once again, videogames are the target of some focus group, blaming all the problems of fat, lazy children on our beloved hobby. The Scottish executive have teamed up with sports scientists and head teachers to try and lure children away from consoles and back to more traditional school playground activities like skipping and tag.

I'm not going to bore everyone with the "I have been playing videogames for 20 years and they never did me any harm" story but... well... I have been playing videogames for well over 20 years, more so now than when I was younger as I find myself with more free time and, more importantly, pots of cash due to a good job.

My point you ask? My point is simple, when I was at school, I was encouraged to play sports by my teachers and parents (volleyball and basketball in my case), I had a group of friends who would go out and ride our bikes or play football. When it rained, or when it was a dark night, we stayed in and played videogames.

I am now 35, I ride a mountain bike regularily, I go running, I go to the gym, I own all the new consoles and spend a lot of time playing games. There is balance in my life, this is just the way I

"As a 32-year-old, I still enjoy a fair amount of shooting, dodging, puzzling, etc. But I'm no longer sure that's enough for my generation – one is often the subject of derision"



Ben Hall argues that it's all over far too quickly for Luigi. Just as well the Dreamcasts still going cheap then, to offer gaming that's value for money

was brought up. My parents never saw anything wrong with me playing videogames because I also played sport, read books and was generally a healthy child.

As videogames get more and more blame for the ills of society I get more and more irate. Our hobby, like any other regular activity, is not damaging in any way to an individuals health or social outlook when taken in moderation. If your child is obese and lazy, it's not because he plays videogames, it's because you, as parents, don't regulate the child's activities correctly or there isn't enough encouragement to play sports at school, or probably both. Therefore the child has been let down by parents or teachers.

It seems that we live in a society where, if something goes wrong, we look for someone to blame, someone or something else other than ourselves. I am sorry but, the simple truth is that we, as a society, are to blame for making our kids lazy and obese not Sony, Nintendo or Microsoft.
Marcus Waldock

At the moment I'm skint. Having recently bought a GC and a handful of titles – including *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin*, I was left a bit dissappointed when they were over so quickly. I'd heard they were short (though of excellent quality), so I did try to rent them first from a major video store, only to dicover that these very rentable titles were among the few unavailable. I wonder if this is a deliberate policy from Nintendo?

Anyway, a few days later I was in a games store when I noticed a Dreamcast (second hand) for £36, less than any GC game. On impulse I bought it along with five or six games (pre-owned), all priced at under £7. In the three weeks that have followed, I have noticed that as many GAME and EB stores are doing away with the DC altogether, the prices for most used and new games have dropped still further (*Power Stone* for £1.99, *Bass Fishing* £2.99 – anyone?). I have been astonished at the quality of many of these titles, notably those from Capcom and Sega themselves. If anyone else out there (poor or otherwise), wants good quality, bargain bucket gaming, I suggest you act fast; before the DC becomes the reserve of the specialist (and expensive) gaming culture.
Ben Hall

How many people read each copy of **Edge**? Let's assume two as a working guess. Let's assume your circulation is 100,000 (you can supply the real number). If everyone who reads **Edge** bought their own copy, that figure would be 200,000. So you have 100,000 lost sales and are losing £400,000 a month through 'readership piracy'.

Why aren't you angry about this? Why aren't you trying to stop this huge monthly loss? Answer: because you have more sense, and you know perfectly well that you aren't really losing that amount of money, and that most of the people that read someone else's copy of **Edge** wouldn't buy their own copy anyway.

So why is the software industry allowed to get away with special pleading that software is a totally different case? The bottom line is the same: there are people who will buy the product for sure, and people who won't buy the product for sure. Whether people in the second group have access to illicit copies actually makes little difference to their behaviour. And in the case of children, they can't spend money they don't have. There may exist a third group, who will accept pirate software if they can, and will buy legitimate copies if they can't, but how large is this group really? My suspicion is that it is not really all that economically significant. It really doesn't matter if it's computer games, music CDs, magazines or books – in all cases there are notional lost sales that really are notional.

Copyright is copyright, and theft is theft, and I'm in favour of the first and against the second. But the claim that software piracy is losing the industry £3 billion is hogwash and shouldn't be entertained.
Roger Musson

The articles in E113 that dealt with the industry and its disheartening trend to cash in on old licences was completely true and indeed backed up by games previewed in the issue. Developers seem ready to evoke even the oldest and most cherished spirits to create 'new' games (*Shinobi* and *Ninja Gaiden*) in order to sell a few more copies by using a licence.

There are massive similarities that can be drawn with film and the way Hollywood reels in the audience with sequels and remakes ('Spider-Man' and 'Men in Black 2'). But as a scholar of film and a lover of videogames it's interesting to look at what else sells a film to an audience, compare it to what sells a game and it's simple. Games sell themselves short and compensate with excessive use of licences.

The situation when going to the cinema and working out which film to see is derived from figuring out the factors, is it one of my preferred genres? Did I like the previous film(s) in the series? Do I like the studio that produced the film? Do I like the actors/director/ producers?

And it is the last factor that games seriously lack. The world of games has few real stars. The gamer has no frames of reference on which to judge a game worth buying other than the excessively strict idea of genre and the use of a licence. There are exceptions to this but Hideo Kojima and Peter Molyneux aren't quite as respected or as well known in the world of games as Tarantino is in film. After all, creating a game is an act of creation and every act of creation is its own form of art. In film the Auteur theory was created as film evolved and individual style became more relevant. Artists such as Hitchcock and Tarantino blurred the lines between genres, formed their own style, took credit for their creativity and became stars.

If more developers exerted themselves as artists on to a game, thought in greater terms than the games genre and fitting the licence I believe we would be on the better road. *Rez* proved to me, with its brilliant styling, that there are artists out

"Copyright is copyright, and theft is theft and I'm in favour of the first and against the second. But the claim that software piracy is losing the industry £3 billion is hogwash"



The *Army Men* licence: capable of opening up a new audience for videogames? Or a desperate ploy to fool customers into parting with their cash

there but these people need faces and names. We need to know who they are so we can commend them and use them as reference when buying games. All we have at the moment are the corporate logos. Gaming is therefore comparable to being in the film industry of the 1930s, when studios dictated genre just as Capcom produce only arcade-feeling, action games.

It's just sad to say gaming looks to be going down the same road, rebirthing the old until the clichés wear thin and most of us lose hope. We need saviours from the insipid but if we continue to go down the same road as film it's going to have get a lot blander before things can get any better.

A gaming renaissance as I speak? I hardly think so. This is the time of the cash-in because they don't need artists to sell games. This is the gaming equivalent of those endless reams of same-styled Bogart movies. Not bad, just not original.

But don't worry, in a postmodern treat our children will play a glorious personally styled game that defies genre and licence and shows an artist on true form. A game where Princess Peach has been kidnapped again but you don't have to save her because Mario's finally realised to be kidnapped so often, she's one daft bint.
Greg Carruthers

Once again you spark my interest with controversy. A delightfully tabloid heading for the front cover, followed by a one-sided and naive argument between the covers. Will licences and sequels kill videogames? I seriously doubt it, in fact they are probably the key to expansion into a wider demographic.

There seems to be a horrible misconception that 'big business' is crippling the creativity of the software entertainment industry. Clearly your publication believes film tie-ins and and sequels are to blame. Rubbish, any licence can yield a good gaming experience, but mainly they don't.

The largest publishers are businesses. First and formost their aim is to make a profit. This is not greed, it is capitalism. Software engineers and designers can go home safe in the knowledge that they are being paid. Simple. Why aren't all games 'good'. Well in an ideal world all games would be fantastic, but then where would **Edge** be? All your scores would have to change so you only rated games 9.0 to 9.9.

It also seems that innovation is hailed as a sacred cow. It's easy to list 20 games based on a movie that turned out to be poor. I think it's probably as easy to list 20 games that were startling new ideas that turned out to play like old dung. I can't help mentioning *Black & White* in this category. Let's face it as far as numbers go it will always be a case that there are relatively few games that are great followed by the vast majority which are average and then a smaller number that are poor.

Now the next sensationalist claim in your editorial. When people buy bad games they never buy any more. It seems incredibly short sighted for a member of the public to buy a console at the cost of £150+, buy one game for it and decide that it's all a write-off. That's what your publication would have us believe. Isn't that like saying I could buy a new stereo, hear a Spice Girls album on it and then pack it away forever?

If I am a novice to the world of games how do I know what is a bad game? Let me illustrate this point with a personal example. My mother-in-law loves the *Tomb Raider* games. She loves them so much in fact that she has bought all of them. Quite clearly they got gradually worse, but she bought them anyway. She thinks they are 'good' games, and who are we to tell her otherwise. She gets enjoyment out of them and she will continue to buy the brand name in future. She has no frame of reference for good and bad only that she likes *Tomb Raider* games.

The fact is people love bad games whether **Edge** likes it or not. Success stories such as *Myst* and *Army Men* tell you clearly that quality is not the be all and end all of games. So how are the evil corporations making sure our favourite pastime is slowly being destroyed? Simple, they are giving us the products we buy. Slapping on a licence, or making a series almost guarantees sales.

People in general don't read reviews, their experience with games is limited by high prices and a bewildering choice. Staff in specialist game shops are not trained to give advice to customers. They are retail staff first and game experts second. With no advice on which game to choose to make best use of your limited leisure time it only seems right that you plump for the game of your favourite movie.

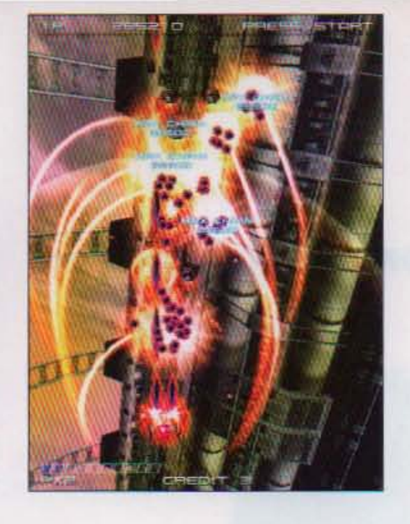
It's so simple it should make you cry. The people who buy games vote with their wallets, and the big publishers listen. And why should software be any different to the movies or music or comics or books, or newspapers. 'Quality' will never be in the majority because it simply doesn't sell. If there were stringent quality guidelines the world would be a much quieter place. Your local GAME store would be half empty, and who would want to look around a shop like that?

Finally how can the 'current' trend for licences and sequels help rather than hinder? (I'm sure I heard people moaning about this very subject when I was playing games on my Spectrum). Well the secret is expanding the market so people who don't play games want to play them in the future. Licensing could help here. Just imagine all your mothers going out to buy the new *Sims* game, not because they suddenly realise games are not such a waste of time, but because it has the 'Coronation Street' licence. Or perhaps your grandfather might suddenly take interest in the new Delia Smith kitchen management game. Licences are a genuine pathway to a wider market. The only crime I can see is the publishers thinking that the pie is a fixed size, and the only way to get bigger is to cut yourself a larger slice.

Thank you for stirring such debate. As long as your magazine continues to force us into exercising the old grey matter I will continue to keep up my subscription.
Justin Cook

"Imagine all your mothers buying the new Sims game, not because they suddenly realise games are not such a waste of time, but because it has the 'Coronation Street' licence"





Where next for *Dance Dance Revolution*? asks Pungee, while DevilHeart Storygun suggests a multiplayer direction for shooters such as *Ikaruga*

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **Dance Dance Revolution – where next?**
Poster: **Pungee**
I consider myself a big fan of Konami's *DDR* series but have recently been wondering what is left for the series. We've had mirror, double, stealth modes (to name but a few), the 'freeze' arrow, the diet mode and many others but now it feels like the series is running out of ideas. Will *DDR* fans be happy with the simple addition of a new soundtrack with each release? Does *DDR* need new additions to improve? Will these new additions detract from the experience?

I think a logical step the series could take would be an Xbox version which would make use of the hard drive to allow us to make our own steps for the songs stored on it. I think that this would add to the longevity of the game and keep the game fresh for as long as the player wishes. Konami could offer downloads and competitions using the Xbox Live service.

Poster: **Lakitu**
I'd like to see *DDR* attach a couple of lightguns to the arcade, and then have you dance and shoot your way through an action musical set to the theme of a revolution in a banana republic. *Dance Gun Revolution* would be an appropriate title.

Poster: **iainl**
Or perhaps a steering wheel, and the longer a combo of correct moves you string together the faster your car goes. *Dance Racer Revolution*, if you will. Or do a *DDR* game with Minter-style trippy vectors: *Dance Dance Rezolution*.

Poster: **declan**
I agree that the next logical step for *DDR* has to be customisable dance routines. It's already a feature in certain hacked home PC versions, but you know, they're a little naughty. The only problem I have with this is that it would maybe detract somewhat from the freestyle element. It's always cool seeing real freestylers go at it in an arcade, especially with all the songs that you know already, seeing them make the best use of the step pattern. The uneditable nature causes them to get creative.

Although, if they could adopt a memory card feature much like in the arcades in Japan, that would enable people to bring their homegrown routines to the arcade, and really bust some moves.

Poster: **declan**
Then again, they could just replace the trippy background images with visions of death, torture, excrement, and seedy drug use, and call it *Dance Dance Revulsion*.

Subject: **Shoot Club**
Poster: **DevilHeart Storygun**
I have a dream, and that dream is a massively multiplayer vertically scrolling shoot 'em up. You'll log on in the midst of a huge fleet of players, all chatting, decalling up their beautiful ships, trading powerups. You'll find some friends, form a hunting party and break away to the easy gunning grounds close by, earn your wings dodging bullets and bringing down the slow, hulking bosses (20 gun emplacements? That's two each, at least until another gang of players shows up). You put in the hours, you learn/hone your shmup skills, venturing farther out, and then you hit the big time. The purity of intent: stripping your ship down to the bare minimum, streamlining it for speed – multiple weapon systems and shields are wasted space you could be using on score multipliers. The difference between a newbie and a Black Booster is how many hits you are away from strobing neon death: when you're in the zone, you won't need a shield bar. And you'll never be at it alone.

So how do you make it work?

Subject: **Second-guessing games designers**
Poster: **Northy**
Okay, so I've been playing games on all formats for years now and it's got to the point where I can solve most puzzles (especially in adventure games and RPGs) without a great deal of thought. At the moment, I've started playing *Golden Sun* and it all seems to be a bit straightforward (although I've heard that this game is meant to be a bit easy). Also recently, the two *Zelda* games also seemed to be less challenging than the first time I played through *A Link To The Past*.

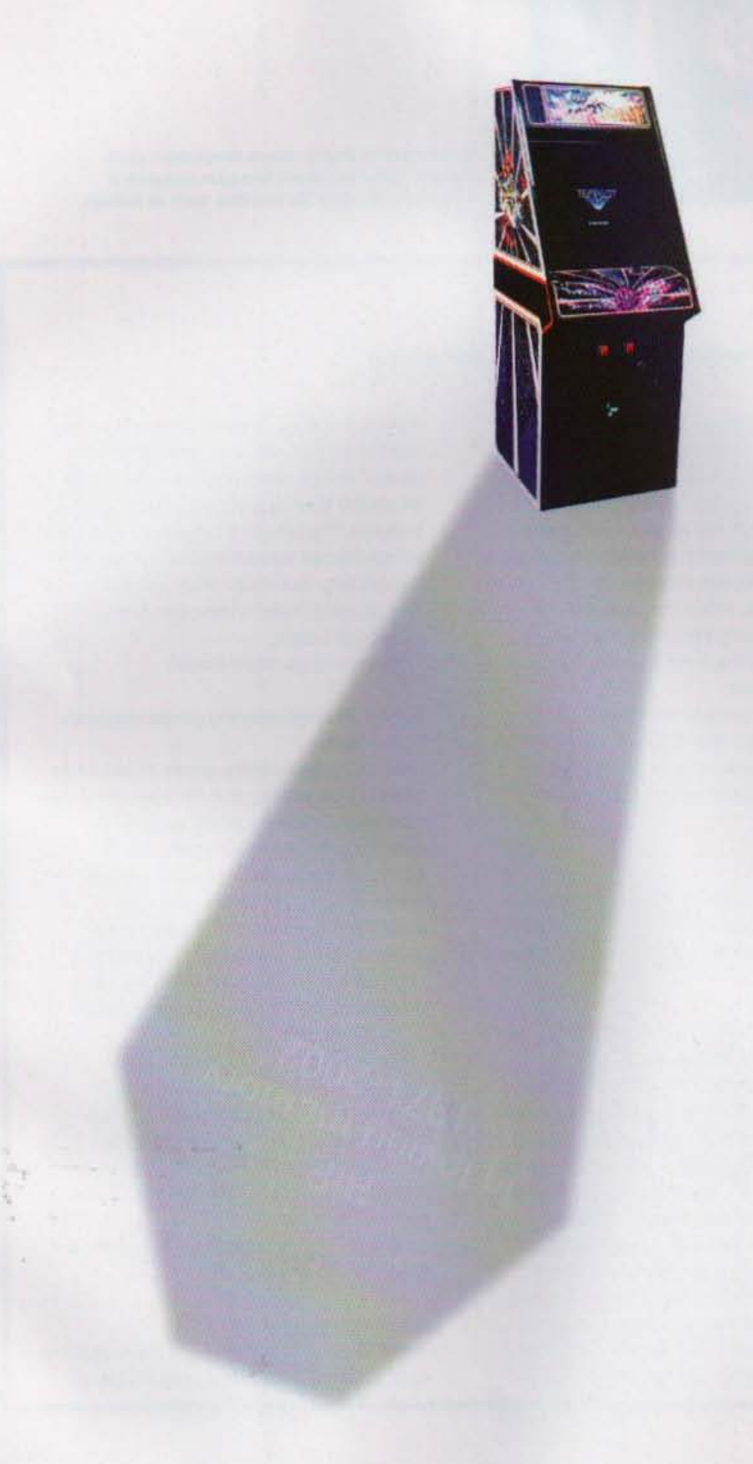
So, to the point... it seems to me you can learn how particular developers think and even though the actual puzzles change from game to game, the general style stays constant meaning that you can actually learn how to be good at solving puzzles by particular developers.

Anyway, that's enough from me, anyone else got an opinion on this one?

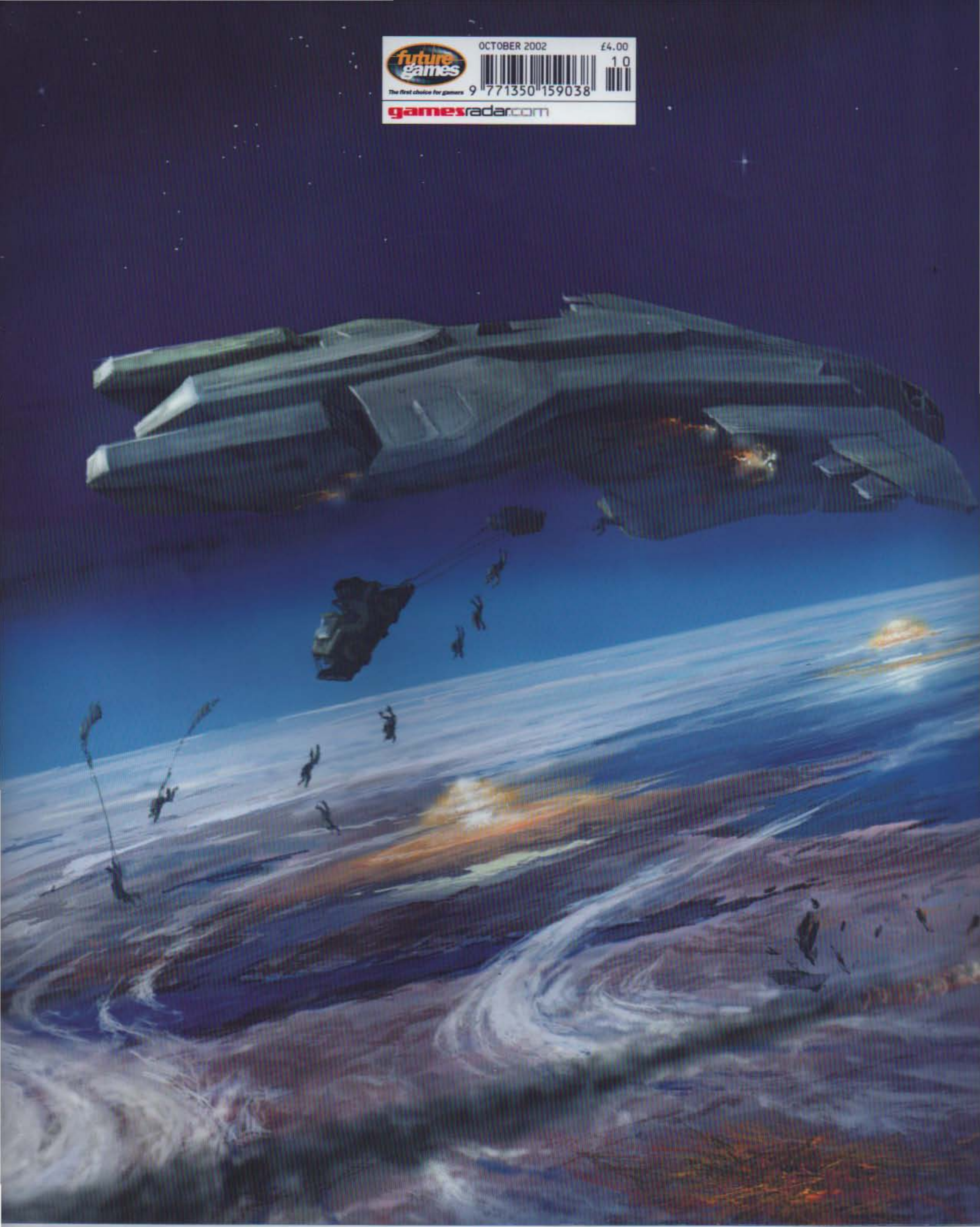
Poster: **daveypauly**
Yeah? Try being a designer trying to second (and third) guess the player; it's a pickle, it really is.

"I'd like to see DDR attach a couple of lightguns to the arcade, and then have you dance and shoot your way through an action musical set to the theme of a revolution"

Next month







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